

American Studies

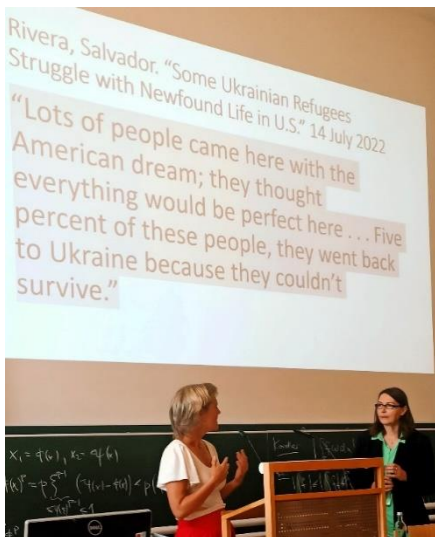
BMBF research project: U.S. Welfare State

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PICAIIS Symposium: A Critical Race Perspective on U.S. Welfare Regimes

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During the past decade, the refugee issue dominated the world's media headlines and has risen to the very top of the global policy agenda. Putin's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing stream of refugees to Germany or the U.S. for more than a year now brought renewed attention to the question of how to successfully integrate refugees and migrants. In the U.S. public opinion particularly among the conservative white population, but also government officials across parties have often demonstrated a racialized resistance to immigrants. Hence, a timely discussion is needed on how these newcomers are incorporated into U.S.-society at a time that is marked by increasing right-wing populism, an unregulated neoliberal economic system, a diminishing welfare state, and declining public support for immigration. The interdisciplinary symposium in conjunction with the Chair of American Studies' BMBF research project on the U.S. welfare state provided an apt opportunity.



Karsten Fitz & Grit Grigoleit-Richter provided in the introduction a critical race framework for the symposium by shifting the traditional discussion from how immigrants are incorporated into the host society to questions of how immigrants and their communities are racialized and thus integrated into a racialized society. Claudia Sadowski-Smith, Arizona State University, followed that critical approach and shared in her opening lecture insights from her latest research on how Ukrainian refugees are perceived and incorporated in the U.S. Drawing on Whiteness research she demonstrated how post-Soviet immigrants were collectively racialized as White, which also refers to upward mobility. Incoming Ukrainian refugees currently benefit from this racialization process as they are greeted with public support and have access to federal benefits including resettlement and cash assistance; benefits that are not readily available to other refugee groups who seek admittance to the U.S. Thus, racialization processes determine the redistribution and allocation of resources and accordingly spur or hinder immigrants' incorporation into racialized communities.

The ensuing parallel lectures demonstrated how local histories, perceptions, and the framing of race and settler colonialism continue to shape structural inequalities among racialized populations. Andrew Torget, University of North Texas, vividly displayed the long history and continuance of race as a social construct in Texas. David Hugill, Carlton University, Ottawa, examined

the long-lasting impact of settler colonialism in creating urban space, namely Minneapolis, Minnesota, whose racialized economy severely contradicts its “progressive” reputation.

After the theoretical input and case studies, students as well as the guests from the Gymnasium Vilshofen engaged in an interactive workshop. Themed around the main topics from the symposium, immigration, settler colonialism, Civil-Rights Movement, and welfare state, they explored E-posters and led discussions that allowed them to build a coherent understanding from a critical race perspective. The workshop provided a wonderful occasion to raise awareness about racialized structures and engage in critical dialogue in an out-of-school place of learning.¹

The final roundtable discussion *Let's Talk: Racism in the U.S. and Germany* stimulated a larger and more comparative conversation on underlying racialized structures and the at times not so subtle forms of everyday racism that severely impact immigrants' integration within both the U.S. and Germany. Eunike Piwoni, University of Passau, shared some findings from her current research on second generation experiences and perceptions of exclusion and forms of discrimination such as microaggression, racial slurs/jokes, barriers to educational opportunities, or even physical attacks. The ensuing lively discussion illuminated commonalities in the construction of "others" and othering processes as well as the deep entanglement of migration, racism and anti-racism in Germany and the U.S., even though differences in migration histories and contexts between the two countries exist.



¹ See: entry at the Gymnasium Vilshofen website:
<https://gym-vilshofen.de/index.php?view=article&id=163:akademischer-tag-in-der-amerikanistik-fortsetzung-der-kooperation-des-gymnasiums-vilshofen-mit-der-universitaet-passau&catid=35>