

Call for Papers: International Graduate Conference 2021

Radical Possibilities: Protest, Crisis and Reshaping North American Democracies

Graduate School of North American Studies, John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin

Online conference, July 1-2, 2021 (July 1, 6-10pm CET, July 2, noon-8pm CET)

The past four years have seen repeated claims of “unprecedented times” in the United States and in North America generally.

Widespread protests over the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, growing far-right extremism, attacks on the institutions of democracy itself, and, of course, a pandemic have exposed and deepened societal divides. Yet, as every crisis, it has also revealed the desire of the greater public to participate in, and even radically alter the shape of political processes. The massive waves of social protests, the upswing in politically engaged art, and the intense debates that have dominated the media show that these divides have been taken up by the collective consciousness. Rather than deepening the divide, could this crisis offer radical possibilities?

While the election of Joe Biden and the premiership of Justin Trudeau might seem to foreclose the necessity of transformation in favor of reform, we are interested in exploring potential futures which go beyond a liberal common sense. From large-scale transnational activism for racial justice to smaller, community-based projects such as urban agriculture movements, possibilities for transformation seem to arise at all levels of North American society. How does crisis fuel these transformations? Is protest a necessary tool to apply pressure to stagnant institutions? How can the concept of democracy be adapted, or even reshaped, to account for the radical potential of these social movements? How can alternative visions be created through cultural and aesthetic practices and what is their relationship to social change?

This conference explores the radical possibilities and choices with which North American democracies are faced. We invite contributions across disciplines from graduate students, post-docs, academics, or activists relating, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Hope, optimism, and political imagination
- Anti-racism, abolition, reparations, and decolonial futures
- Environmental justice and ecologies
- Settler colonialism and Indigenous rights
- Community organizing and local change
- Queer futures and the politics of gender
- Citizenship rights, voter suppression and accessing democracy

- The future of Medicare and the possibility of health system reform
- Technoscapes and the role of digital media in protest
- Populist rhetoric, conspiracy theories, and right-wing radicalization
- Writing the crisis and alternative subjectivities in literature
- Poetry as protest and politically engaged art
- Wealth inequality, unemployment, and alternative economies
- New epistemologies and methodologies
- The commodification of crisis

Abstracts should be limited to **300 words** and submitted online [here](#). Submissions need to be received by **March 15th**. Confirmations of acceptance will be sent by April 30th. In case you have any questions, you can contact us at conference2021@gsnas.fu-berlin.de.