

About the workshop

Biography is among the most venerable and commercially successful genres of historical writing. General readers are fascinated with the life stories of major historical figures and they also cherish the human touch of viewing history through the eyes of ordinary individuals. Although critics have frequently assailed biography for celebrating “great men” and elevating “agency” over “structure,” none of the historiographical paradigm shifts over the past fifty years – from the new social history to the various cultural turns – has seriously damaged the popularity of biographies among general and academic audiences. Historians have continued to employ biographical approaches in nearly all subfields and disciplines, while the new cultural history with its emphasis on narrative has spawned lively theoretical debates. This workshop brings together scholars who are currently working on major biographical studies. Protagonists include Mary McLeod Bethune (Anja Schüler); Angela Davis (Sophie Lorenz), Felix von Luschan (John David Smith), Alexander von Humboldt (Andreas Daum), and Woodrow Wilson (Manfred Berg). The focus of this workshop are the practical challenges the participants face in their current research.

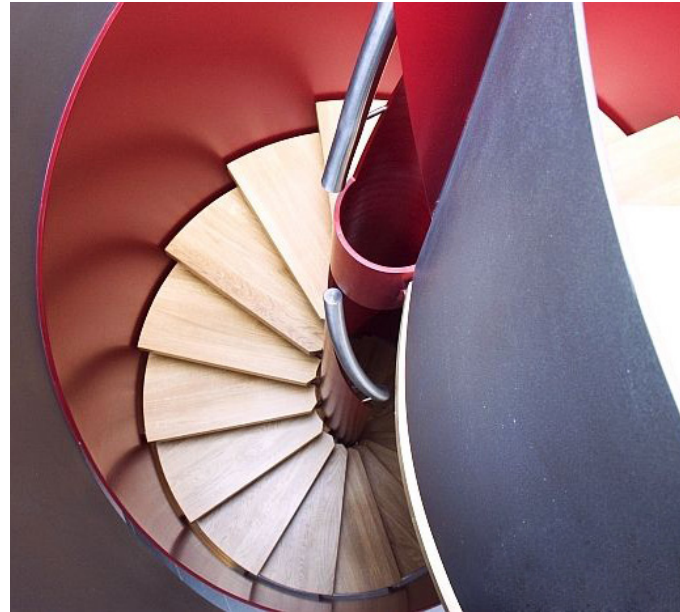
Convened by Manfred Berg, Curt Engelhorn Chair in American History at Heidelberg University

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THE CHALLENGES OF DOING BIOGRAPHY

Workshop

July 3, 2015

Heidelberg Center for American Studies

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9 – 10 a.m.

Volker Depkat (University of Regensburg):
Reflections on the Epistemology and Narratology of
Biography

10 – 11 a.m.

Andreas Daum (University at Buffalo, SUNY):
"Portrait Without Frame"? Approaching Alexander
von Humboldt's Biography

Coffee Break

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

John David Smith (UNCC):
From Doubting Thomas to Decoding Luschan:
Challenges of Writing Intellectual Biography

Lunch

2 – 3 p.m.

Manfred Berg (Heidelberg University):
Why Write Another Biography of Woodrow Wilson?

Coffee Break

3:15 – 4:15 p.m.

Anja Schüler (Heidelberg University):
"The Life and Times of Mary McLeod Bethune":
Writing for a General Audience

4:15 – 5:15 p.m.

Sophie Lorenz (Heidelberg University):
How Using a Biographical Lens Helps Understand
Angela Davis' Encounter with East Germany.

7 p.m. Dinner