

CFP - "Generations and Generational Time in the United States During the Long Nineteenth Century"

Lille University, June 12-13, 2025

Confirmed keynote speakers :

Brigitte Fielder, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dana Luciano, Rutgers University

The United States was born of generational thinking. As Enlightenment philosophy created a new sense of allegiance among people roughly the same age, revolutionaries discovered new language with which to articulate their cries for independence. "Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself in all cases as the age and generations which preceded it," Thomas Paine wrote in *Rights of Man* (1791). "Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow." By this logic, colonies must reject the so-called parent country's tyranny and decide their own fate -- though the United States quickly became such a "parent" itself through its expansionist and imperialistic policies. "The very idea of generations resonated with new meaning after the Revolution," Joyce Appleby notes in *Inheriting the Revolution*, as people born after the American Revolution "looked more to their peers for models of behavior" as a result of weakening family ties. Beyond the revolutionary period, generational thinking deeply imprinted itself on U.S. politics and society, forming a pattern in which youth kept wresting power from posterity and asserting its right to shape the nation in its own time. It may be argued that some of the century's most consequential conflicts unfolded along generational lines.

If generational thinking is indeed "the essence of the modern," as Michael Warner has observed, Americans seem to have often relied on that essence to structure their experience of time and of one another. That structure, with the linear experience of time that it implies, is disrupted by many elements, including a profusion of grieving practices-- the "temporal play authorized by grief"-- which Dana Luciano theorized through the concept of "chronobiopolitics." Other scholars have explained how generational logics of transmission account for continuity, reproduction, and status quo, which leaves many groups excluded. The stability which the generational framework implies is not, Jack Halberstam reminds us, available to oppressed groups for whom "generationality [...] can also indicate a different kind of history, a history associated with loss and debt." Keeping generational time may appear as a privilege that does not apply to those "outside of recognized structures of belonging that include ancestry and descent," as Elizabeth Freeman underscored in her own deployment of the concept of queer temporality. In the

context of slavery, Hortense Spillers has clarified that, for African Americans, “‘kinship’ loses meaning, since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations.” It is by recovering kinship's importance to nineteenth-century racial formation that Brigitte Fielder recognizes race as "relative" and develops her concept of "racial (re)formation," situating her analysis "between the persistent notions - and legal imperatives - inherited through genealogical lines of descent and theories of race's construction in various historical moments and social spaces." In her study of the Grimkes over three generations, Kerri K. Greenidge illuminates the differing intergenerational legacies--of slavery, of complicity with racial oppression, of victimization and commodification -- at work among both the white and Black members of the family. Yet, as Elizabeth Freeman pointed out, "[g]eneration' [...] cannot be tossed out with the bathwater of reproductive thinking," for the generational model also helps us precisely to imagine links and solidarities beyond family ties.

Our goal is to provide an opportunity to investigate modes of relationality, kinship, or fellow-feeling throughout the nineteenth century while questioning and complicating the "generational model" (Jennifer Purvis). This conference encourages participants to explore any aspect of generations and generational time in U.S. culture and history throughout the long nineteenth century — an age of sweeping transformation and turmoil, as entire populations were uprooted and exploited, women and people of color struggled to have their personhood fully enshrined under the law, economic disparities yawned ever wider, and the republic tore itself apart. Within the parameters of long-nineteenth-century American culture and history, we seek to provide space and time for all kinds of generational meta- discourses. We encourage submissions on topics including, but not limited to, the following:

- Generational conflicts and communion, whether political or cultural, at the local or national levels
- Questions of inheritance, legacies, and transmission
- The construction and representation of particular generations and their eras
- Representations of age and aging
- The gendering of generational relationships and thinking and resistance to it
- Race and generations
- Generations, imperialism, and (settler) colonialism
- Generational thinking across or along class lines (i.e. generational wealth or poverty)

- Queer theory, as related to issues of reproduction and futurity
- Theories of life, organic form, and vitality
- Measuring/situating the "age" of movements, ideologies, institutions, nations, i.e. Douglass rejoicing "in the full-grown man of anti-slavery" while recalling "the cradle, nor the terrible struggles which have intervened—the periods of weakness and strength, of infancy and maturity."
- Influence and intertextuality, particularly across generational lines
- Generations and nineteenth-century historiography
- Transatlantic/transnational perspectives on the generational

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The deadline for submissions is November 30, 2024. Paper and panel proposals will be considered. Please submit proposals to: helene.cottet@univ-lille.fr; helene.quanquin@univ-lille.fr; matthew.redmond@univ-lille.fr.

Organizing committee :

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