

■ INTRODUCTION

»Freedom Then, Freedom Now«: An Interdisciplinary and Transnational Dialogue on the U.S.-American Civil Rights Movement

The latest edition of the KZG/CCH appears in restless, even disrupted times. The pandemic continues to dominate world politics and is having an impact on all social interactions through to the smallest, most familiar exchange. At the same time, the prolonged handover of power in the White House is exposing weaknesses and vulnerability of western democracies to populist autocrats who are more than willing to hold the common good hostage to their own political survival. The topic of racism and coming to terms with its history played a central role in the election campaign for the Office of President of the United States and, in turn, quickly placed discussion about Europe's colonial past on the agenda of social debates. Consequently, the topic of this issue is highly relevant.

This issue will publish contributions to the workshop »Freedom Then, Freedom Now«: An Interdisciplinary and Transnational Dialogue on the U.S. American Civil Rights Movement«. This workshop was held at the University in Oldenburg on 29–30 November 2020. The workshop's primary focus was the reception of the American Civil Rights Movement (CRM) and its figurehead, Martin Luther King, within a range of different disciplines (including American Studies, Historical Studies and Theology) in the German academic context. The starting point for this inter-disciplinary collaboration was the historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's critique of the traditional and frequently politically exploited forms of the Culture of Memory and Remembrance Policy with respect to the CRM. In her research, Hall identifies »a dominant narrative of the civil rights movement« that neglects all other aspects, participants and content-related focuses or, at the very least, subordinates them to the interests of acquiring knowledge.¹ Official memorial culture concentrates exclusively on the so-called »classical phase«² of this movement, typically seen in the mass protests, starting with the Montgomery bus strike, dating from 1954. In this way, King's greatest goal – the process of institutional and structural transformation to achieve an equal-rights, democratic, multicultural, and multi-ethnic society – falls out of sight within this narrow perspective. Historical enquiries into the Culture of Memory, therefore, need to pay far closer attention to an expanded perspective on the Civil Rights Move-

1 Cf. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past*, in: *The Journal of American History* 91/4 (March 2005), 1233.

2 This description can be traced back to Bayard Rustin, a leading figure of the Civil Rights Movement. Cf. also: Nicole Hirschfelder, *Oppression as Process. The Case of Bayard Rustin*, Heidelberg 2014; Jerald Podair, *Bayard Rustin. American Dreamer*, Lanham 2008.

ment, and call into question its history, responsible figures within the movement and its inherent complexity. In reality, it is historically essential to understand the Civil Rights Movement or, respectively, the Black Freedom Struggle, as a much longer process, which is also experiencing a further configuration in the present-day »Black Lives Matter« movement.

During the workshop, analysis was undertaken of the reception of the CRM in Germany specifically, including the associated Culture of Memory from an interdisciplinary perspective. In line with the individual specialist discipline, the CRM's reception in Germany was subject to respective critical analyses. Unfortunately, the total number of German academics undertaking research into the »long-term« Civil Rights Movement and its reception with respect to the different phases of German history continues to be comparably low. This productive workshop can therefore be seen as an important step towards the establishment of a research network that might invite and integrate further international researchers in the future. The network's goal is to promote and deepen understanding of the CRM and its continuing importance, also specifically encouraging trans-Atlantic dialogue, which would include not only the »long-term« Civil Rights Movement, but also the present-day societal challenges regarding structural racism.

Other contributions to this issue begin with Anne-Catherine Pardon's article, which deals with the Anti-Judaism of the well-known and controversial German exegete, Gerhard Kittel, before the beginning of the Nazi dictatorship, based on meticulous discourse analysis (CDA). This year saw the publication of a comprehensive anthology covering Kittel's works³, which Pardon supplements by an important content-related facet based on a RGG article (2nd edition, 1929) with regard to Kittel's relationship to Judaism.

In his article, Rony Ojajärvi examines the background and early history of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR). In doing so, he undertakes a critical reconstruction of the various historical contexts and their respective impact on the foundation of a Christian International organisation. It is a very welcome development that this article takes into consideration the fundamental significance of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which has experienced very little analytical focus from European researchers, incorporating also the FoR's time dependency and its interdependent history with many other groups.

Jaroslav Vokoun portrays one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century, Ernst Troeltsch, based on his attitude to »Americanisation« in German post-war society after 1918. In his sociological research into religion, Troeltsch – a close »expert friend« of Max Weber – distinguishes himself through his presentation of the continuing cultural significance of Protestantism and of religion(s), especially in North America, in that he points out their orientation-giving potential in a time that is experienced as crisis-ridden, which should exert influence

3 Manfred Gailus / Clemens Vollnhals (eds.), *Christlicher Antisemitismus im 20. Jahrhundert. Der Tübinger Theologe und »Judenforscher« Gerhard Kittel*, Göttingen 2020.

on the German Empire a posteriori in the sense of *liberal modernization*. In this way, it is possible for Vokoun to provide Troeltsch with a quite differentiated view on American democracy in the USA, which served him as a model in his political work.

Stefan Gärtner pursues a very distinct topic in the history of the university as he looks into the transformation process of the denominational character of the Tilburg University in the Netherlands over the course of the 20th century. He picks up on the planning and installation of a »silence facility« as evidence of a core change in the university's self-conception.

The article written by Hallgeir Elstad and Dag Thorkildsen analyses current developments and serious structural changes within the Protestant-Lutheran Church in Norway, which no longer holds the status of state-church following constitutional changes in 2012. It is particularly interesting to read about the content-related structuring of the separation of Church and State that is now firmly established in constitutional law, which the authors consider from a number of different perspectives.

The issue is concluded with three reviews, which take up various contributions on contemporary church history and church organisations.

Andrea Strübind, November 2020