

“UNDER DECONSTRUCTION: HOW AMERICAN ARE THE AMERICAS?” SITUATING CANADIAN STUDIES WITHIN AMERICAN STUDIES

The 2008 Summer School project, a Utrecht Network initiative carried out by the Center for the Study of the Americas (CSAS) of the University of Graz in Austria, took place from July 13th to 27th, 2008, at Seggau Castle, Austria, on the theme *Under Deconstruction: How American are the Americas?* It offered eight lectures by renowned scholars and 44 workshops in the five following modules: Politics and History; Cultural Sociology; The Americas: Complex Identities; Fiction, Poetry and Drama; and Film and Visual Arts.

One difficulty encountered by the presenters and participants was to refrain from associating the words America and American with one country alone, mostly the United States. The keynote address by documentary filmmaker Dan Banda emphasized this difficulty. Throughout his presentation, he used interchangeably the words America, American and U.S. to refer to matters pertaining to United States. His address meanwhile was truly inter-American and studied immigration in United States, particularly coming from Mexico. Mr. Banda underlined the nature of the current debate about immigration in this country and the measures taken to prevent the entry of illegal migrants. His presentation emphasized the importance of approaching American immigration and “American Studies” from a more hemispheric point of view since most people living today in United States are immigrants or of immigrant descent.

Overall, almost half of the plenary speakers approached the Americas from a hemispheric perspective. In other cases, where the presentation was more specific on a particular region or nation, the questions and answers sessions allowed students and professors to create a broader view of the Americas that included Canada and other American countries. One suggestion from the students was that the first lectures should be inter-American in order to provide a framework for other lectures.

Two speakers, Christer Lindbergh and Don Sparling addressed the difficulties faced by Canadians in recognizing multiculturalism in Canada which is made more difficult today with the number of groups involved. It has been noted that both lectures could serve as microcosms for the complexities of American identities.

In the end, all the participants, lecturers and students concluded that the interdisciplinary and international nature of the field of Inter-American Studies makes it very attractive and perilous at the same time and that individuals involved in its study must be willing to look beyond national, political and linguistic barriers to redefine the Americas. For more information regarding the CSAS Summer School project, [click here](#).