



Race in Time

Historical perspectives on the contemporary matter of Blackness

International workshop organised by
 Nicholas R. Jones (Yale) and Monika Raič (HU Berlin)
 Humboldt-University Berlin, Unter den Linden 6, Lichthof Ost
 May, 26th 2025 | 1 - 7 p.m.

Race is a social construct that categorises people based on perceived biological and cultural characteristics. Historically, race has been used to justify hierarchies, systems of power and oppression, and is deeply embedded in imperialism, colonialism and slavery. These historical foundations continue to shape social, economic and political realities and influence contemporary experiences of identity and discrimination.

In his latest book, *Cervantine Blackness* (2025), Nicolas R. Jones explores the complexity of Blackness within racial discourse as a historical, rhetorical and cultural construct, as opposed to a stable, uniform identity. He critiques traditional approaches that romanticize Black agency, arguing that such frameworks often oversimplify the nuanced realities of Black experience, which he analyses specifically in early modern representations such as the writings of Miguel de Cervantes. Jones situates Blackness as a capacious and dynamic phenomenon, encompassing intersections of race, culture, embodiment, and spatiality. Within race studies, his approach emphasises the importance of examining Blackness not only in terms of resistance or presence, but as a process shaped by cultural, material and literary forces. This methodological framework challenges Eurocentric and reductive narratives and emphasises Blackness as central to understanding broader histories of racialisation.

Building on this intersectional, queer, de- and reconstructed theoretical point of view, the workshop papers will explore Blackness in different historical periods and in different regional representations, including Europe, Latin America and (North) Africa. In doing so, they challenge static notions of race by emphasising its fluidity, its shifting agencies and representations, thus asserting the need to disrupt culturally essentialist narratives of race and foreground the dynamic, contextual nature of Blackness in cultural, literary and social contexts.

Programme

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| 1 p.m. | Welcome and introduction |
| 1:30 p.m. | Nicholas R. Jones, Yale University
Keynote Cervantine Blackness |
| 2:30 p.m. | Monika Raič, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Response Loneliness and blackness in Argentine Literature. On Roberto Arlt's "La isla desierta" |
| 3:30 p.m. | Joanne Brueton, University of London, Institute in Paris
Rewriting the 'grand récit': palimpsestic fictions in Mbougar Sarr and Chamoiseau |
| 4:30 p.m. | Michail Leivadiotis, Freie Universität Berlin
Canonised Blackness. Textual and visual hagiographic testimonies of black discourse in Byzantium |
| 5:30 p.m. | Juan Antonio Macías Amoretti, Universidad de Granada
Blackness and subaltern culture/s in the Afro-Arab context |