

# Introduction

by Alfred Hornung and Martina Kohl

**The current edition of the *American Studies Journal* has its roots in the Third U.S. Embassy Teacher Academy which took place in the fall of 2005 in Bad Kreuznach. The conference was jointly organized by the U.S. Embassy, the American Studies Department of Mainz University and the Atlantische Akademie Rheinland Pfalz. It focused on “Arab American Literature and Culture” and thus a minority that drew a lot of attention in the U.S. and abroad after the tragic events of September 11.**

The organizers of the conference decided to explore this long neglected segment of American society and culture because they realized that curricula in schools and universities only slowly began to discover Arab Americans, that knowledge was limited, often colored by prejudice, and resources were scarce.

The election of Barack Obama as president of the United States, who gained first-hand knowledge of a Muslim society during his time in Indonesia, appears to be a proper moment for the publication of this issue. After many discussions, further readings and additions to the original conference contributions, we are proud to present Issue 52 of the ASJ. It is a truly interdisciplinary endeavor in that it combines historical, legal, political, geographical and cultural approaches to an exciting field.

Lisa Majaj, a Christian Palestinian author currently living in Cyprus, provides a much needed survey of the origins and developments of Arab-American Literature. Mark Tessler, leading political scientist at the University of Michigan, presents the results of extensive polling done in Detroit’s Arab-American community, the largest in the U.S., on transnational communication and its implications and cultural consequences. Anton Escher, Professor of Geography at Mainz University, uses the example of an American family to sketch out the global diaspora anchored in a Syrian village. In her presentation on legal aspects, Arab-American lawyer and lecturer at Cologne University Ghada Qaisi Audi charts the history of current issues in immigration and integration policies in the US with respect to Arab and Arab Americans. Mita Banerjee, Professor of American Studies at the University of Siegen, teams up with Günther Sommerschuh, a teacher trainer and textbook editor from Kiel, to discuss the stereotypical portrait of Arab Americans in film in the EFL classroom. This contribution is complemented by Rolf Theis, teacher trainer and contributor to many textbooks from Frankfurt, in his discussion of “Muslim-Americans in American Society and in the German Classroom.”

In addition to these presentations from the Teacher Academy, we asked Anneka Esch-van Kann to contribute her research on Arab-American theatre, a new field of dramatic expression, rarely treated in the survey on Arab-Americans. Her analysis of the theatre of Yussef El Guindi provides new insight into poetic reactions to 9/11.

Finally, Omar Khalidi, Professor of Muslim architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, generously agreed to have his photos of American mosques and his accompanying essay included in this issue. Dr. Khalidi’s photographs have been shown in several countries around the world including Germany, Russia, Turkey, and Pakistan. In every case they have served as an excellent starting point for discussions on religious freedom in the U.S. and elsewhere. We find that these photos will help start discussions on tolerance and the acceptance of different ethnic groups in the classroom.

We thank all contributors and hope that the current issue of the ASJ motivates our readers to expand their teachings and put an ethnic group on the map of German curricula which adds a diverse, rich cultural tradition to the colorful landscape we call America.

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