GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT GÖTTINGEN IN PUBLICA COMMODA SEIT 1737

HCA HEIDELBERG CENTER FOR AMERICAN STUDIES

UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG ZUKUNFT SEIT 1386

American Liberal Protestantism and Its Global Entanglements, ca. 1850-1930

May 22–23, 2026

Heidelberg Center for American Studies, Hauptstr. 120, 69117 Heidelberg, Oculus

This workshop focuses on American liberal Protestantism – specifically the varieties that grew out of New England Congregationalism. All too often the historical development of this tradition during the long nineteenth century is still conceived in nation-centered terms, even though some recent studies have demonstrated how much American liberal Protestantism was shaped by global exchanges. The goal of the workshop is to further understand the various ways in which both white and Black Unitarian and Universalist churches, as well as related movements such as Transcendentalism and Spiritualism, entered into contact and exchanges with different regions, including not just Europe but also the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

Rather than adopting a model of unilateral influences, we aim to understand how individuals and institutions in these regions interacted with each other through personal networks, publications, and physical mobility, including travel and missionary work. By tracing these interactions through new archival sources, we hope to contribute to writing a history of liberal Protestantism's global entanglement that will paint a more complex picture of how progressive and reformist religious movements from the US were deeply shaped by their encounters abroad, while also significantly contributing to the development of the religious landscape in several parts of the world. Special attention will be given to the complex role American liberal Protestantism played in negotiating the conflicting meanings of "Christianity" and "religion(s)" in relation to categories such as race, nation, and culture.

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To receive the Zoom link, please register with emessamore@hca.uni-heidelberg.de

Friday, May 22, 2026

CEST 4:00–5:20 p.m. — EDT 10:00–11:20 a.m. | Panel 1

Jan Stievermann (University of Heidelberg)
"Moncure Conway Reads Emersonian Religion At Home and Abroad"

Dan McKanan (Harvard University)
"Liberals and Capitalists: Lay Unitarians and Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century"

CEST 5:40–7:00 p.m. — EDT 11:40 a.m.–1:00 p.m. | Panel 2

Fred Muir (Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis)
"Confronting US Colonialism: Ethical Witnessing as a Challenge to American Imperialism"

Chris Cameron (University of North Carolina at Charlotte)
"From Montego Bay to Harlem: Rev. Ethelred Brown and Unitarianism in the African Diaspora, 1890–1930"

Saturday, May 23, 2026

CEST 1:00–2:20 p.m. — EDT 7:00–8:20 a.m. | Panel 3

Satoru Kimura (Harvard University)
"Toward a New Coalition of Religious Liberalism: American Unitarians and the International Congress of Religious Liberals, 1900–1920"

Hans Martin Krämer (University of Heidelberg)
"Buddhist-Unitarian Cooperation in Japan around 1900"

CEST 2:40–4:00 p.m. — EDT 8:40–10:00 a.m. | Panel 4

David Holland (Harvard University)
"Unitarianism, Christian Science, and the New Thought Movement"

Everett Messamore (University of Heidelberg)
"James M. Peebles 'Around the World': A Spiritualist's Travels through 'Heathen' Countries"

CEST 4:20–5:50 p.m. — EDT 10:20–11:50 a.m. | Panel 5

Michael Bergunder (University of Heidelberg)
"Rammohan Roy and Protestant Unitarianism"

Julian Strube (University of Göttingen)
"Universalism versus Nationalism between Asia, Europe, and the United States"

Moritz Maurer (University of Vienna)
"Rudolf Walbaum: Between Unitarianism and Völkisch Religion"

CEST 6:30–7:30 p.m. — EDT 12:30–1:30 p.m. | Discussion and Future Plans