The Department of History announces the public lecture of

ANDREW ZIMMERMAN
Department of History, George Washington University, Washington, DC.

Race against Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe: From Hegel to Weber, from Rural Insurgency to ‘Polonization’

In the nineteenth century, scientific discourses about race emerged around the world in the service of imperial and domestic state power, capital accumulation, and, most broadly, what Michel Foucault has characterized as the biopolitical management of populations. These racial discourses had not only to serve elite powers but also, and from the beginning, to contend with the knowledge and power of populations they were designed to subjugate politically and exploit economically. This lecture will reverse the common relation of power and resistance, where popular knowledge and power are seen to emerge in response to, and against, elite knowledge and power. Instead it will begin with popular insurgencies and suggest that it is elite power that should be considered opposition and resistance - resistance to popular democratic and autonomous politics. The development of racial science in the nineteenth century, it will argue, was an elite response to a set of worldwide popular rural insurgencies against bonded labor, principally serfdom in Europe and slavery in the Americas.

This lecture will begin with the rebellions that ended serfdom in East Elbian Germany under Napoleonic occupation and the way the knowledge these movements created found its way into the work of Hegel and his successors, including Marx and Engels. It will then look at how Prussian authorities employed racial knowledge about Poles and Germans to manage and control the seasonal migrant workers who replaced the labor of emancipated serfs on Prussian estates. The German social scientist Max Weber built a theory of economics and culture on these racializing strategies of Prussian political and economic elites. Weber’s cultural and social understanding of race, to an extent at least as great as biological racisms, has had a major impact on contemporary forms of racisms, in both the Cold War and the neoliberal era. Returning to the Central and Eastern European roots of these racisms, as well as to the popular democratic insurrections to which they were responses, thus has not only an historical but also a critical-political contemporary interest.

Andrew Zimmerman is professor of history at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. He is the author of Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany (Chicago, 2001) and Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South (Princeton, 2010). He is also the editor of Marx, Engels, and the United States Civil War, forthcoming from International Publishers. Currently he is working on a book analyzing the American Civil War as a confluence of transnational revolutionary movements against slavery and against wage labor.