

**[CFP: Panel: Brecht, Race, and Capitalism's Global Crises
German Studies Association, 45th Annual Conference Sept.
30 - Oct. 3, 2021, Indianapolis, IN](#)**

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CFP: Panel: Brecht, Race, and Capitalism's Global Crises

German Studies Association, 45th Annual Conference

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Session sponsored by the International Brecht Society

In her essay on Bertolt Brecht (in *Men in Dark Times*) Hannah Arendt identifies race, specifically anti-Semitism, as Brecht's major blind spot. She argues that his adherence to a Marxist framework led Brecht to view fascism as an expression of capitalism and to explain the rise of Hitler solely through the economic inequities and class struggle to which capitalism gave rise. What Brecht failed to recognize was the extent to which the Nazis were fuelled by anti-Semitism. Thus while Brecht's writings capture the criminal, violent, and dehumanizing features common to both capitalism and fascism, according to Arendt, his analysis remains virtually silent on the issue of racism.

Arendt's characterization of Brecht is exaggerated and informed by a somewhat simplistic depiction of the Marxist analysis of fascism, to be sure. However, Arendt is right to insist that a nuanced analysis of the rise of fascism must recognize the intertwinement of capitalism with systemic racism. We see this intertwinement at work again in the rise of far-right extremism today, which is fuelled by the ongoing migration crisis and the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

The aim of this panel is to explore the topics race, racism, anti-racism in Brecht, but through the lens of the present COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic occurred against the backdrop of rising neo-fascist, far-right movements across the late-capitalist democratic Western world, and it has shown how even some of the most affluent liberal democracies are profoundly unjust societies. If the pandemic revealed the intertwinement of capitalism and racism, then it also galvanized democratic and anti-racist social justice movements.

There are many parallels between Brecht's Weimar Germany and our world today, on which numerous historians have drawn in order to explain the rise of contemporary far-right extremism and in particular Trumpism. By interrogating Brecht on the issue of race through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic and capitalism's other global crises, this panel aims to shed light on both Brecht and on the complex challenges that we face today.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

Brecht, natural disasters, capitalism as a natural disaster

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The capitalist response to crisis

BIPOC themes in Brecht

Epidemics and plagues in Brecht's writings

Brecht and/on anti-Semitism

BLM, Gestus, protest

Brecht and race/racism

Anti-racism with Brecht?

Please send abstracts (250 words) to Elena Pnevmonidou, University of Victoria (epnev@uvic.ca) by February 2. All panelists must be registered GSA members before February 15, 2021.

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