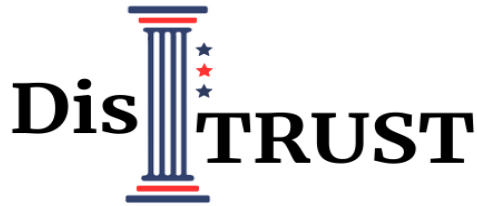


CALL FOR PAPERS



Irish Association
for American
Studies



Irish Association for American Studies Annual Conference

University College Dublin

1-3 May 2024

Conference Theme: “Dis/Trust”

Keynote Speakers: Dr Imaobong Umoren (London School of Economics)
Prof. Johannes Voelz (Goethe-University Frankfurt)

“In God We Trust.” While these words, printed on every coin and banknote issued by the Federal Reserve, evidently speak to the importance of religion in the United States, they also acknowledge the centrality of trust to America’s self-image. Even for those thinkers whose interests have been more secular than religious, the special status and nature of social trust in the US has been a subject of comment and debate. In *Democracy in America* (1835/1840), Alexis de Tocqueville praised the American culture of voluntary association as an antidote to the loss of trust that came with the decaying of the old regimes and rising class conflict in Europe. In the late twentieth century, neo-Tocquevilleans including Francis Fukuyama (*Trust*, 1995) and Robert Putnam (*Bowling Alone*, 2000) argued that the high-trust character of communal life was crucial to American success but that it was coming under renewed threat in an age of economic globalisation. Today, the increasingly polarised quality of American cultural and political life, fuelled by bitterly contrasting media narratives, seems to indicate that social trust is indeed breaking down.

Yet to view the US as a high-trust society in present-day decline also involves overlooking those who have historically been excluded from its networks of social trust. While the American dream has traditionally offered immigrants a reason to trust in the possibilities of their new lives, American reality has often inculcated distrust more than trust. For marginalised and racialised groups – including but not limited to Native Americans and African Americans – it has been particularly difficult to trust in the benevolence of an American state founded on their destruction and enslavement, and to feel part of a shared history in which promises have been broken and treaties disregarded. The expansion of American Studies into a transnational and hemispheric discipline over recent decades has also drawn attention to trust and distrust of American power, particularly in the history and cultural production of peoples who have fallen within the ambit of that power.

Trust can be described as a feeling, an attitude, an atmosphere, or a relationship (Baier 1986, Hosking 2014). It has been considered a means to reduce modern complexity (Luhmann 1973), a cognitive-emotional coping mechanism that facilitates action in situations of uncertain outcome (Schloss 2021). Although a regular subject for social scientists, the fact that trust tends to be invisible and unconscious (especially when functioning well) makes it an equally appropriate subject for the humanities. Social trust provides “the ethical substance of everyday life” (Bernstein 2015) and becomes most evident only in its absence, when what was previously trusted becomes open to question. The present moment in the United States is arguably defined by a heightened consciousness of issues of trust and distrust: we invite papers that address this moment, but we are equally interested in papers that consider dis/trust at other moments in American history and culture.

We welcome papers on the general theme of “Dis/trust” from all disciplines in American Studies, broadly defined. Possible paper and panel topics may include but are not limited to:

- American histories of dis/trust
- Literary histories of dis/trust
- Dis/trust and American politics
- Dis/trust and the visual arts
- Dis/trust and disinformation
- Interpersonal, institutional, and distributed trust in the US
- Digital ecologies of dis/trust
- American experiments in trust
- Paranoia and dis/trust
- Dis/trust, economy, finance
- Dis/trusting American power
- Dis/trust and the racial imaginary
- Dis/trust in/of the American academy
- Gendered histories of dis/trust
- Queer(ing) American dis/trust

Abstracts of 200-300 words for 20-minute papers, along with an author bio of c.100 words, should be submitted by attachment to trust.ucd@gmail.com by **1st February 2024**. We also welcome joint proposals for panels of three papers, or panels with innovative formats. Applicants will be informed by the end of February as to their acceptance for the conference.

The IAAS is an all-island scholarly association dedicated to promoting interdisciplinary American Studies in Ireland. We are dedicated to equality, diversity, and inclusion, and we welcome proposals from under-represented groups. We also encourage proposals from researchers who are based at institutions around the world, whose research stems from a variety of disciplines and languages, and who are at any career stage. Some IAAS bursaries are available to support the participation of early career and precariously employed researchers. You can apply for these at the IAAS website: <https://iaas.ie/bursaries/>

All presenters must be members of the IAAS to register for and attend the conference. More information is available here: <https://iaas.ie/memberships/>.

This conference is held in association with the Irish Research Council-funded project “Imaginative Literature and Social Trust, 1990-2025.” The website is: www.trustlit.org.