AMERICAN CULTURE HISTORY AND SOCIETY

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
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Course number: 512.321
Room and Time: HS 06.02 (Vorklinik), Fri., 13:30-15:00
First session: October 16, 2015

Course description: This survey course will deal with key developments, timelines and topics in American cultural history over the past 500 years. Aspects to be discussed include Puritanism, the ‘American Dream,’ the Melting Pot, Slavery, Urbanity, and the ‘West.’ We will take a closer look at the specifics of what is commonly called ‘American exceptionalism’ and address questions such as: What makes America unique? In how far is American society indebted to influences from other nations and cultures? How can we explain the enduring fascination with myths and fantasies grounded in America?

Methods: Interactive presentations of important timelines and themes in American history and society.
Assessment: Reading assignments; final exam.

SYLLABUS

16 October The Cultural Beginnings – Native Americans, Puritans, Religion / 1490s – 1770s
   Additional texts (recommended):
   Perry Miller, from Errand into the Wilderness (1956), 1-15.

23 October Early U.S. History – The American Revolution and National Self-Formation / 1770s – 1820s
   Main text (obligatory):
   Additional texts (recommended):

30 October The American Dream and the Protestant Work Ethic / 1770s – Today
   Main text (obligatory):
   Additional text (recommended):

06 November ‘The Melting Pot’: America in the Age of Mass Immigration / 1820s – Today
   Main text (obligatory):
   Additional text (recommended):

13 November Slavery, the ‘Old South,’ and the Civil War / 1600s – 1860s
   Main text (obligatory):
   Additional texts (recommended):

20 November The West – Expansionism, Manifest Destiny, and the American Frontier / 1820s – 1890s
   Main texts (obligatory):
Additional texts (recommended):
Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893).

27 November Urbanity and Civilization – From the ‘City upon a Hill’ to the Postmetropolis / 1830s – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Additional texts (recommended):

04 December Imperialism and Ideology – Becoming a World Power / 1820s – 1920s
Main text (obligatory):
Additional text (recommended):

11 December ‘Us. vs. Them’ – From the ‘Red Scare’ to the ‘War on Terror’ / 1930s – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Additional text (recommended):

18 December Technology and Progress – From the Industrial Era to the Atomic Age / 19th Century – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Additional text (recommended):

- Christmas break Relax and enjoy! -

08 January Domesticity, Sexuality, and Consumer Culture / 19th Century – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Additional texts (recommended):

15 January U.S. American Civil Rights Movements / 19th Century – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Additional text (recommended):
Martin Luther King, “I Have a Dream” (1963).

22 January Postmodernity – Into the New Millennium / 1960s – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Additional texts (recommended):
Barack Obama, second inauguration speech, Jan. 21, 2013.

29 January Final Exam