American Cultural Memory
Trauma, Collective Imagery,
and the Politics of Remembering

Syllabus

HS 32 112 Friday, 14-16, John F. Kennedy-Institute, Room 201, Summer term 2004

Dozent: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, slbrandt@zedat.fu-berlin.de

Course description: This course will focus on the aesthetic strategies of remembering that can be found in contemporary American literature and culture. The concept of “cultural memory,” coined by Jan Assmann in the 1980s, has attracted academic attention across the disciplines in recent years. Memory culture, in this view, is the way a society ensures cultural continuity by preserving its collective knowledge from one generation to the next. Especially after September 11, questions have come up about the dynamics of remembering and the functions of collective memory. In what ways is mourning a part of remembering? How does the representation of memory in cultural texts function as mourning? The course will analyze a wide range of ‘texts’ (films, novels, short stories, photographs, architectural sites) where cultural identity is formed through narratives of memory and trauma. The seminar will be held in English.

Occasional film screenings: Fri, 16-18, Room 201

Credit requirements: Regular attendance, active participation in class, oral presentation, a mid-term paper and a final paper (à 6-8 pages). There will also be a few quizzes meant as an encouragement to keep track with the assigned reading.

Required reading: A course reader is available in the copy-shop at Königin-Luise-Str.


**Extra Screening: MEMENTO (Christopher Nolan 2001)** (Fri, 16-18, Room 201)

**30. April 2004:**  **Individual Memory**

**Extra Screening: FORREST GUMP (Robert Zemeckis 2001)** (Fri, 16-18, Room 201)

**7. May 2004:**  **American Cultural Memory: An Overview**

**14. May 2004:**  **Commemoration and National Identity**
Ward Churchill, “Deconstructing the Columbus Myth: Was the ‘Great Discoverer’ Italian or Spanish, Nazi or Jew?” (1997)

Main texts: Toni Morrison, chapters from Beloved (1987)
Extra texts Sabine Bröck, “Postmodern Mediations and Beloved’s Testimony: Memory Is Not Innocent” (1998)
Kai Erikson, “Notes on Trauma and Community” (1995)

**Extra Screening: GONE WITH THE WIND (Victor Fleming 1939)** (Fri, 16-18, Room 201)

**28. May 2004:**  **Memories of the ‘Old South’**

— Mid-term paper —
Late papers will be graded down!

11. June 2004: Holocaust

Extra Screening: JFK (Oliver Stone 1991) (Fri, 16-18, Room 201)

Main text: Barbie Zelizer, “Covering the Body” (from: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory) (1992)

Main texts: Don DeLillo, Libra (1988)

Extra Screening: Full Metal Jacket (Stanley Kubrick 1986) (Fri, 16-18, Room 201)

02. July 2004: Vietnam


09. July 2004: September 11


— Final Paper —
Late Papers will be graded down!