American Culture – History and Society

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
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Course number: ENM.01301UB
Room and Time: HS 06.02 (Vorklinik), Fri., 13:30-15:00
First session: October 14, 2016

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.
Important note: Alternatives to the scheduled exam dates are not possible!

Syllabus

14 October The Cultural Beginnings – Native Americans, Puritans, Religion / 1490s – 1770s
Basic text (obligatory):
Additional text (recommended):
Perry Miller, from Errand into the Wilderness (1956), 1-15.¹

21 October Early U.S. History – The American Revolution and National Self-Formation / 1770s – 1820s

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

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

11 November Independent Study Unit -- Slavery, the ‘Old South,’ and the Civil War / 1600s – 1860s
No class today!
Main text (obligatory):
PowerPoint Presentation on “Slavery, the ‘Old South,’ and the Civil War”
Additional texts (recommended):

¹ All texts for this course are available on Moodle: http://moodle.uni-graz.at/construct/index.php.
18 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).

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

02 December  
Imperialism and Ideology – From the Monroe Doctrine to the War on Terror / 1820s – Today
Main texts (obligatory):
Additional text (recommended):

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

16 December  
Progress and Technology – From the Industrial Era to the Atomic Age / 1820s – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Additional text (recommended):

13 January  
U.S. American Civil Rights Movements / 19th Century – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Additional texts (recommended):

20 January  
Cultures of Protest – The Beats, the Hippies, and Other Forms of Cultural Resistance / 1950s - Today
Main text (obligatory):
Additional text (recommended):
Martin Luther King, “I Have a Dream” (1963).

27 January  
Main text (obligatory):
Additional texts (recommended):
Barack Obama, second inauguration speech, Jan. 21, 2013.

03 February  
Final Exam