Introduction to Cultural Studies (USA)

Übung, LV-Nr. 050663C, 3 CP
B.A. Anglistik/ Amerikanistik

Lecturer: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
Room and time: GABF 04/613 (Süd), Tuesdays 16-18

Short description: This course provides an introduction to the field of ‘Cultural Studies’ with a focus on the USA. Students will obtain knowledge of the key theoretical models as well as the methods deployed by (American) Cultural Studies. In each case, we will test the practical use of our results by applying them to cultural practices (in the broad sense) such as TV, film, music, painting, advertising, sports, and photography. In addition, the categories of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality will be discussed in their repercussions for individual and group identities and with regard to their reflection in contemporary U.S. American literature and popular culture. The second main aim of the class is to give an introduction to the most central facts of American Landeskunde, which will also feature a look at the socio-historical and mythological dimension.

Grading: Apart from regular attendance and participation in class discussions, each student will have to be an expert in one session and prepare a handout (group work possible). There might also be unannounced ‘pop quizzes’ to check if you have read the texts. Poor attendance or class participation will negatively affect your grade.

Syllabus:

Basic texts:

Required reading:
Possible examples: Images and illustrations from the Revolutionary Era, short Revolutionary poems.

03. Nov. ‘American’ and ‘Americanness’: Exceptionalism and Cultural Identity
Required reading:
Possible examples: Short speeches by former U.S. leaders (e.g., T. Roosevelt, G.W. Bush).

10. Nov. Puritanism and Religion
Required reading:
Possible examples: Images of churches and sermons, stills/clips of TV preachers (e.g., Pat Robertson).

17. Nov. The Old South
Required reading:
Possible examples: Images and poems of the Old South, clips from films (e.g., Gone with the Wind).

Required reading:
- Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1956 [1893]).
Possible examples: Images of the frontier (Buffalo Bill, Billy the Kid, etc.), Wild West films.
01. Dec. The ‘American Dream’ (‘From Rags to Riches’)
Required reading:
Possible examples: Images of self-made men (e.g., Horatio Alger), songs, films (e.g., Pretty Woman, 1990).

08. Dec. Ethnicity and Immigration
Required reading:
Possible examples: Images of immigrants from the 19th century, Chinatown, early Jewish culture.

15. Dec. The African American Civil Rights Movement
Required reading:
Possible examples: Documents of the African American Civil Rights Movement, Emmett Till, MLK.

22. Dec. Vietnam & Counter Culture
Required reading:
Possible examples: Short poems by Beat authors, Woodstock, Vietnam War movies.

Required reading:
Both in RR: 39, 45-52.
Possible examples: Influential TV series, examples of mass consumerism (walkman, Coca Cola).

Required reading:
Possible examples: Gender bending, feminist icons, photography (R. Mapplethorpe), queer television.

Required reading:
Possible examples: Fan fiction, comics, ‘cult’ TV series, pop icons (M. Monroe, J. Dean, Madonna, etc.).

02. Feb. Post 9/11: Trauma, Nationalism, and Postnationalism
Required reading:
  Arundhati Roy, comment in Guardian (Sep. 29, 2001).
Possible examples: Images from 9/11 (‘falling man’), television footage, Afghanistan, Iraq War.

All theory texts are contained in a reader which is available for 1 EUR.

For films, please go to the ‘Mediathek’, GB 03/33 (Nord). The ‘Mediathek’ is open Tue, 11-14, Wed, 12-16, Thur, 12-16. Important note: Films can be checked out only over night (!) or over the weekend. Make sure you return the film the next possible weekday at 12!