AMERICAN CULTURE —
HISTORY AND SOCIETY

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
Contact: stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Course number: 512.321
Room and Time: HS 06.02 (Vorklinik), Fri., 16:00-17:30
First session: October 10, 2014

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

Oct. 10  The Cultural Beginnings – Native Americans, Puritans, Religion / 1490s – 1770s
Basic texts (recommended):
   Perry Miller, from Errand into the Wilderness (1956), 1-15.
   Sacvan Bercovitch, “Puritanism and the Self.” In: The Puritan Origins of the American Self (1975), 1-34.¹

Oct. 17  Early U.S. History – The American Revolution and National Self-Formation / 1770s – 1820s
Main text (obligatory):
   Basic texts (recommended):

Oct. 24  The American Dream and the Protestant Work Ethic / 1770s - Today
Main text (obligatory):
   Basic text (recommended):

Oct. 31  ‘The Melting Pot’: America in the Age of Mass Immigration / 1820s - Today
Main text (obligatory):
   Basic text (recommended):

Nov. 7   Slavery, the ‘Old South,’ and the Civil War / 1600s – 1860s
Main text (obligatory):
   Basic texts (recommended):

Nov. 14  The West – Expansionism, Manifest Destiny, and the American Frontier / 1820s – 1890s
Main texts (obligatory):

¹ All texts for this course are available on Moodle: http://moodle.uni-graz.at/construct/index.php.
Basic text (recommended):
Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893).

Nov. 21
No class!
Please join our International Conference “Space Oddities: Urbanity, American Identity and Cultural Exchange”

Nov. 28
Urbanity and Civilization – From the ‘City upon a Hill’ to the Postmetropolis / 1830s - Today
Main text (obligatory):
Basic texts (recommended):

Dec. 5
Imperialism and Ideology – Becoming a World Power / 1820s – 1920s
Main text (obligatory):
Basic text (recommended):

Dec. 12
‘Us. vs. Them’ – From the ‘Red Scare’ to the ‘War on Terror’ / 1930s – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Basic text (recommended):

Dec. 19
Technology and Progress – From the Industrial Era to the Atomic Age / 19th Century – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Basic text (recommended):

- CHRISTMAS BREAK RELAX AND ENJOY! -

Jan. 9
Domesticity, Sexuality, and Consumer Culture / 19th Century - Today
Main text (obligatory):
Basic texts (recommended):
Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity” (1998);

Jan. 16
The Civil Rights Movement / 19th Century – Today
Main text (obligatory):
Basic text (recommended):
Martin Luther King, “I Have a Dream” (1963).

Jan. 23
Postmodernity – Into the New Millennium / 1960s - Today
Main text (obligatory):
Basic texts (recommended):
Jean Baudrillard, “Astral America” (2010 [1986]).
Barack Obama, second inauguration speech, Jan. 21, 2013.

Jan. 30
Final Exam