

AMERICAN CULTURE – HISTORY AND SOCIETY

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
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Course number: V 512.320
Room and Time: HS 06.02 (Vorklinik), Wed., 13:30-15:00

First session: March 13, 2013

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 question 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

- Mar. 13** **The Cultural Beginnings – Native Americans, Puritans, Religion / 1490s – 1770s**
Basic texts (recommended):
Joyce Appleby et al., "Colonizing America," from: *The American Vision* (2005).
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
- Mar. 20** **Early U.S. History – The American Revolution and National Self-Formation / 1770s – 1820s**
Main text (obligatory):
"The American Revolution," from *World History: Patterns of Interaction* (2006).
Basic texts (recommended):
Thomas Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence" (1776).
J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, "What Is an American?" from *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782).
- Mar. 27,** **No class! (Easter Holiday)**
Apr. 3 & 10 *Relax and enjoy!*
- Apr. 17** **The American Dream – Immigration and the Protestant Work Ethic / 1770s - Today**
Main text (obligatory):
"The American Dream Then and Now," <http://home.arcor.de/vhailor/413_FF_Fact_file_3_NRW.pdf> (2006).
Basic texts (recommended):
Axel R. Schäfer, "American Immigration" (2006).
Max Weber, "The Spirit of Capitalism," from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).
- Apr. 24** **The "Problem of the Color Line" – Slavery, the 'Old South,' and the Civil War / 1600s – 1860s**
Main text (obligatory):
Joyce Appleby et al., "The Crisis of Union" from: *The American Vision* (2005).
Basic texts (recommended):
Howard Temperley, "Slavery and Secession" (2006).
Edward Ranson and Andrew Hook, "The Old South," from *Introduction to American Studies* (1989).
- May 1** **No class! (Day of Labor)**
Relax and enjoy!

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



- May 8** **The West – Expansionism, Manifest Destiny, and the American Frontier / 1820s – 1890s**
 Main texts (obligatory):
 Joyce Appleby et al., “Manifest Destiny” from: *The American Vision* (2005).
 Diagram “Westward Movement” (2001) & painting *American Progress* by John Gast (1872).
 Basic texts (recommended):
 Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, “Approaches to Regionalism – The West and the South” (2006 [1997]).
 Joyce Appleby et al., “Settling the West” from: *The American Vision* (2005).
 Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893).
- May 15** **Urbanity and Civilization – From the Cosmopolitan City to Postmetropolis / 1830s - Today**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Joyce Appleby et al., “Urban America,” from: *The American Vision* (2005).
 Basic text (recommended):
 James Donald, “City,” from: *New Keywords* (2005).
 Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, “The American City” (2006 [1997]).
- May 22** **Imperialism and Ideology – Becoming a World Power / 1820s – 1920s**
 Main text (obligatory):
 J. Appleby et al., “Imperialism and Progressivism,” *The American Vision* (2005).
 Basic text (recommended):
 Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life” (1899), <<http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/speeches/trstrenlife.pdf>>.
- May 29** **‘Us. vs. Them’ – From the ‘Red Scare’ and to the ‘War on Terror’ / 1930s – Today**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Joyce Appleby et al., “The Cold War Begins,” from: *The American Vision* (2005).
 Basic text (recommended):
 Brian Holden Reid, “America and War” (2006).
- June 5** **Technology and Progress – From the Industrial Era to the Digital Age / 19th Century – Today**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Joyce Appleby et al., “The War Ends (section 5 on the Atomic Age)” from: *The American Vision* (2005).
 Basic text (recommended):
 J. Robert Oppenheimer, “The Atomic Age” (Nov. 22, 1945).
- June 12** **Domesticity, Sexuality, and Consumer Culture / 19th Century - Today**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Joyce Appleby et al., “The Feminist Movement,” from: *The American Vision* (2005).
 Basic texts (recommended):
 Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity” (1998);
 Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, “Gender and Sexuality” (2006 [1997]).
- June 19** **“A Change Is Gonna Come...” – America in the Age of Civil Rights / 19th Century – Today**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Joyce Appleby et al., “The Civil Rights Movement,” from: *The American Vision* (2005).
 Basic text (recommended):
 Martin Luther King, “I Have a Dream” (1963).
- June 26** **Postmodernism and Hyperreality / 1960s - Today**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Joyce Appleby et al., “Into a New Century,” from: *The American Vision* (2005).
 Basic texts (recommended):
 Richard Crockatt, “America at the Millennium” (2006).
 Jean Baudrillard, “Astral America” (2010 [1986]).
 Barack Obama, second inauguration speech, Jan. 21, 2013.
- July 3** **Final Exam**