

Culture Department Course Offerings

Winter Term 2023/2024

Bachelor

Grundlagenmodul

32001 James Dorson/Jessica Gienow-Hecht/Martin Lütke

Understanding North America A

Fri 10-12 and 14-16, R. 340

This comprehensive course introduces students to the fundamentals of the interdisciplinary field of North American Studies. "Understanding North America" (UNA) follows a two-semester format, with the first part (UNA-A) covering the disciplines of literary studies, cultural studies, and history. The second part (UNA-B) will be offered during the summer term and expands the overall framework with the disciplinary perspectives of sociology, economics, and political science. While UNA is one of the most challenging courses at the John F. Kennedy Institute, it will reward students with insights into multiple disciplines along with a solid foundation of knowledge and skills for further studies.

Orientierungsmodul Kultur - Proseminar

32100 Alexander Starre

Rhetoric of Continuity and Change: A Survey of American Cultural History (Seminar)

Tue 16-18, R. 319

This course provides an extended overview of American cultural history ranging from the period of British settlement in the 17th century to contemporary issues in US society. We will read influential texts (speeches, legal documents, essays, etc.) by authors such as John Cotton, Thomas Jefferson, Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King, Betty Friedan, and Ta-Nehisi Coates. Throughout our readings, we will explore public rhetoric as a key factor shaping the cultural trajectory of the United States. After a brief introduction to basic methodologies of cultural analysis, students will investigate the rhetorical, structural, and discursive features of the primary texts through close readings. We will also explore select representations from the fields of visual culture, art, and film.

Vertiefungsseminare Kultur

32101 Rizvana Bradley

Art, Race, and Media Poetics (VM A&B)

Wed 12-14, R. 319, first session on November 1.

This course focuses on the relationships between black aesthetics and the ongoing redefinition and reinvention of art and media cultures. Poetics will be taken up, not as a specific literary form per se, but as a modality of formal innovation that obtains across a variety of genres and mediums. The course will take three modes of black cultural production as its foremost objects of inquiry: film, art, and poetry. Our aim will be to draw from texts and visual material in order to critique the nature of what the contemporary poet, Claudia Rankine, terms the “racial imaginary.” **Please register at:** culture@jfki.fu-berlin.de with your name, matriculation number, study program, home university (if applicable), zedat email address or email address of home university, and type of exchange program (if applicable). **Deadline for registration is October 16, 2023** . Please register on Campus Management as well and as soon as possible.

32102 Annelot Prins

The Art of Monstrous Men (VM A&B)

Tue 18-20, R. 201

Content warning: abuse, violence, sexual assault, rape----- The mythologically masculine figure of the creative genius has often been employed to minimize and excuse violence against marginalized people. In exchange for great art, audiences might be more than willing to look the other way when women, people of color, queer people and children get hurt. With the arrival of social media, the violent price of art by monstrous men has become harder to ignore. Their crimes are all over the internet. When knowledge of the wrongdoings by artists spread, it becomes challenging for fans to ignore the reprehensible behavior of people like Michael Jackson, Roman Polanski, Louis CK, Woody Allen, Bill Cosby, Kevin Spacey and R. Kelly. In this course, we reflect on the dilemma this leaves for audiences: how do we deal with great art made by horrible people? Students will learn how to make use of an intersectional feminist toolbox to engage with questions like: -- Does art have to be moral? -- Can we separate art from artist? Is this dependent on the medium? -- Is the audience complicit or culpable if they continue consuming the work created by monstrous men? -- How does the art by monstrous men play into discussions around individual taste and political identity as shaped by cultural consumption? -- What do strategies of ethical cultural consumption look like? -- Can we have harmless, morally sound cultural products in patriarchal, white supremacist capitalism? -- What is “woke capitalism” and does canceling culture ever work? -- What do accountability and consequences look like? -- Can monstrous men redeem themselves through confessions,

32104 Martin Lütke

Sports in US Cultural History (VM A&B)

Thu 10-12, R. 340

American sports culture frequently serves as an example of an alleged American exceptionalism; a fact that a relative indifference towards soccer, the exceptional “big four” pro sports leagues, and collegiate sports culture (NCAA) seemingly underline. This course sets out to make sense of and (maybe) trouble the narrative of American exceptionalism by examining the history of modern sports in the United States. We will consider the aesthetic, social, cultural, and political factors that contributed to the development and practice of sports from roughly the middle of the 19th century into our current age. The class will approach sports history with a focus on the relationship between sports and society, ie the role that sports has played in shaping ideology and informing popular thought, for example in the context of nationhood and globalization, but also with regard to modern discourses of health and fitness. The ultimate goal of this course is to encourage critically looking at, thinking, and writing about sports as everyday practice and as a professional field, as connected to discourses of health and (the pursuit of) happiness, as media event and content, and as a prominent repository of liberal narratives of meritocracy.

Master

Modul A

32110 Hannah Spahn

Discourses and Practices of Colonization and Settlement (Vorlesung)

Wed 10-12, R. 319

“In the beginning, all the world was America,” John Locke proclaimed in his Second Treatise on Government (1689-90). But when and where does “America” begin? This lecture course deals with colonial societies and intercultural contact zones in North America between the 15th and 18th centuries. We will look at competing European settler cultures, practices of intercultural conflict and intermixture, as well as interdependent socio-economic, aesthetic, and ecological transformations in early modern times (shifting perspective from a Europe-centered narrative of “discovery” to a postcolonial account of conflictive hybridity). Topics include: Early European New World writings (Bacon, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Las Casas, De Vaca, etc.), the first British descriptions of Virginia and New England (John Smith, Thomas Harriot, William Bradford, Thomas Morton), Puritan writings both orthodox and heterodox (John Winthrop, Anne Hutchinson, Edward Taylor, Anne Bradstreet, and others),

Indian captivity narratives and missionary tracts (Mary Rowlandson, John Eliot), ideas and institutions of slavery and freedom (John Woolman, Phyllis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano), intellectual shifts in the late 17th century and in the context of the Great Awakening (Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Chauncy, Benjamin Franklin).

32111 Hannah Spahn

Diffusing Knowledge: Transformation of American Print Culture (HS)

Thu 12-14, R. 201

“Books are for the scholar’s idle times,” Ralph Waldo Emerson famously claimed. In his view, American scholars should have better things to do than waste their time with printed matter. As is well known, however, even Emerson could not quite do without books but was deeply involved in the transatlantic print culture around him, both devouring what he decried as “other men’s transcripts of their readings” and producing his own. In this seminar, we will approach the complex phenomenon of American print culture in three major historical and theoretical contexts. The first is the relation of print to epistemology and what was often described as a “diffusion” of knowledge through print, in the double sense of both a democratization and a disintegration or fragmentation of knowledge. Related to the question of whether print was discussed in terms of progress or in terms of media anxiety, the second context concerns the role of print in emerging modern conceptions of both nationhood and cosmopolitanism. Building on these topics, the third and final focus of the seminar will be on conceptions and practices of print in African American culture.

32112 Winfried Fluck

Changing Narratives about American Popular Culture (HS)

Wed 14-16, R. 319

How can the claim be justified that such popular genres as film noir, the detective novel, the women's melodrama, comics or rap videos can provide important insights into American culture? When the field of American studies was established, its main reference was high culture, defined as a culture of critical negation. Popular culture, especially in such manifestations as Hollywood movies or commercial television, was dismissed as a form of commodified mass culture, an argument for which Frankfurt School critical theory had provided the blueprint. This course will trace the gradually changing views of American popular culture in American studies, starting with the mass culture debate of the 1950s and bringing the story up to the digital present. As a part of this history, key terms of cultural analysis such as myth, symbol, ideology, formula, stereotype, camp, and seriality will be discussed and compared in their explanatory range. Topics that will be highlighted include the long-lasting Americanization debate, depictions of violence and the question of media effects, changing perspectives on the representation of class, race, and gender, the

transformation of American culture by black culture, and the relationship of popular culture and populism.

All of the reading material will be posted on Blackboard.

Credits: To receive a participation credit in this class, regular attendance is required. For full credit, a term paper (of about 15 pages) is required, plus regular attendance.

Registration: All participants must be registered via Blackboard and Campus Management before the first session. If you cannot register online, please contact Regina Götz (culture@jfki.fu-berlin.de) before the beginning of the term; or if you would like to participate, but cannot attend the first session, please contact me (winfried.fluck@fu-berlin.de).

Modul B

32115 Martin Lütke

Media and Cultural Theory in North American Studies (HS)

Tue 12-14, R. 319

This seminar aspires to introduce students to a selection of critical theories in media and cultural studies (in the context of North American Studies). Starting from the assumption that media matter – and have mattered – in the United States (and beyond), we will explore and discuss media theories and theories of cultures and the ways in which they speak to one another, intersect, and function in the so-called field of North American Studies. Not only, but also, in light of the recent debates in the context of the digital turn, we will re-visit crucial moments of the theoretical debates in media and cultural studies. This seminar will hopefully provide a space for us to think critically through the media/culture nexus and to understand what we do – as critical practice – in what German scholars call media culture studies

(*Medienkulturwissenschaften*). ----- **Course requirements:** We will discuss course requirements in our first session, as they depend on the number of students enrolled in the seminar. In addition to regular attendance and active participation (in the shape of reading responses), you will either write a final research paper with a deadline of April 1, 2023, or an in-class exam (in the form of an essay).

Modul C

32113 Martin Lütke

American (Media) Culture after World War II (Vorlesung)

Thu 14-16, R. 319

This seminar aspires to introduce students to a selection of critical theories in media and cultural studies (in the context of North American Studies). Starting from the assumption that media matter – and have mattered – in the United States (and

beyond), we will explore and discuss media theories and theories of cultures and the ways in which they speak to one another, intersect, and function in the so-called field of North American Studies. Not only, but also, in light of the recent debates in the context of the digital turn, we will re-visit crucial moments of the theoretical debates in media and cultural studies. This seminar will hopefully provide a space for us to think critically through the media/culture nexus and to understand what we do – as critical practice – in what German scholars call media culture studies (*Medienkulturwissenschaften*). ----- **Course requirements:** We will discuss course requirements in our first session, as they depend on the number of students enrolled in the seminar. In addition to regular attendance and active participation (in the shape of reading responses), you will either write a final research paper with a deadline of April 1, 2023, or an in-class exam (in the form of an essay).

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32114 Rizvana Bradley

Political Depression and the Aesthetics of Sovereignty (HS)

Wed 16-18, R. 319

How might we begin to approach the affective contours of what Lauren Berlant theorized as the "impassivity" of the historical present, in ways that do not immediately circumscribe the terms of inquiry by demanding they lead to resolution, reparation, or redress? What forms of attunement, accompaniment, and experimentation might be occasioned by inhabiting what the Feel Tank Chicago termed "political depression" as an open question, rather than through predetermined diagnostics? This course takes up such lines of inquiry through explorations of affect

theory, its interlocutors, and its critics, with a particular emphasis on what Sianne Ngai terms “minor feelings” and “negative affects,” in their racial and gendered dimensionality. We will pay special attention to films that obliquely take up this constellation of affective themes, investigating how they aesthetically refract, rather than simply reflect, the myriad impasses (economic, ecological, scientific, political, racial, gendered, etc.) of the present and the project of recuperating sovereignty in the midst of global crisis. ----- **Please register at:** culture@jfki.fu-berlin.de with your name, matriculation number, study program, home university (if applicable), zedat email address or email address of home university, and type of exchange program (if applicable). **Deadline for registration is October 16, 2023.** Please register on Campus Management as well and as soon as possible.

32115 Martin Lütke

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Interdisziplinäre Module

32116 Karin Hoepker, Alexander Starre

The American Campus: Space, Narrative, Media (HS)

Tue 18-20, R. 340

The American college campus has always been more than an architectural space. Over the course of its historical development, it has encoded forms of an idealized national community and various utopian social visions. ----- Whether it's the latest US Supreme Court decision on affirmative action, public debates over legacy systems and student loans, or the latest celebrity admissions scandal, the field of US higher education has seen fierce struggles over class, race, and gender, over white privilege, modes of inclusion and exclusion, and the affordances of education. This course will delve into the imaginaries of the American college campus by surveying representations of student life and the academic workplace in novels, in films, and in

TV series. As a genre, Campus fiction has historically been the site of academic self-reflection and criticism, oscillating between nostalgia and satire. We will analyze and discuss how, within the social microcosm of the fictional campus, conflicting ideas of pedagogy and knowledge production clash and traditional narratives of meritocracy and individualism are thrown into question. ----- Our conceptual framings will include the history and development of American higher education, the recent rise of “critical university studies,” as well as the ongoing campus culture wars, which are often fueled by conservative and right-wing media. Class readings/viewings will include the campus novels *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo and *Real Life* (2020) by Brandon Taylor, the film *Dear White People* (2014), and the Netflix series *The Chair* (2021).

32117 Hannah Spahn
MA Colloquium Culture/Literature
Fri 12-14, R. 201

Graduate School

32120 Frank Kelleter
Theory and Methods in the Study of Culture (Oberseminar)
Tue 14-16 h, 319

This Ph.D.-course deals with theoretical and methodological issues in the study of American culture, focusing on current research projects (doctoral and post-doctoral level) at the John F. Kennedy Institute. Members of the Graduate School are invited to attend; please register prior to the first class with Prof. Kelleter (no later than October 17).