

Culture Department Course Offerings Winter Term 2025

Bachelor

Grundlagenmodul

32001 Kunkel/Lüthe/Wege

Understanding North America A

Fri 10-12 and 14-16 h, room 340 (JFKI)

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

Rhetorics of Continuity and Change: A Survey of American Cultural History (Proseminar)

Wed 12-14 h, room 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. In addition, students need to do independent research on a selection of key terms that are essential for understanding the evolution of American public discourse and intellectual history.

Vertiefungsseminare Kultur

32101 Anthony Obst

Policing and Race in the United States: Structures, Critique, and Resistance (Vertiefung A&B)

Thu 16-18 Uhr, room 201

Over the last decade, the George Floyd uprising and the Black Lives Matter movement have placed the relation between policing and race in the United States under profound scrutiny, raising fundamental questions about the historical roots, structural persistence, and systemic character of racialized state violence. This course explores the social, political, and economic structures that constitute what Elizabeth Hinton and DeAnza Cook describe as “the antiblack punitive tradition in America,” as well as the critique and forms of resistance engendered by this tradition. Students will engage with historical sources, theoretical analyses, and cultural productions that illuminate the relation between policing and race more broadly—including their imbrication with issues of class and gender—across US history, from slave codes to ICE raids.

32102 Esther Prause

Indigenous Activist Practices in North America (Vertiefung A&B)

Tue 10-12 h, room 201

In this seminar, we will focus on a selection of work from the last seventy years by indigenous individuals, organizations, and movements within and beyond national borders. We will challenge conventional understandings of "activism" through the discussion of narratives, performances, and practices across time, communities, and media that could be understood as indigenous activist practice. The course will consist of a series of small case studies (grassroots protests, court cases, artistic works, international diplomacy, culinary practices, and pop-culture), complimented by readings of indigenous political theorists and scholars from associated disciplines. Working at the intersection of Cultural Studies and Native American Studies, we will investigate different strategies employed by indigenous activists and creators in relation to their political demands (such as sovereignty, nationhood, repatriation, and decolonization) within their historical and cultural contexts. We will pay special attention to tribal politics, alliances, and community-internal negotiations of meanings.

32103 Nathalie Rennhack

Women Writing (in) the Early Republic (1780-1810) (Vertiefung A)

Mon 12-14 h, room 201

This class focusses on Early American Women's Writing from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. Throughout the formative decades of the United States, American print culture constantly struggled to define itself and the country as such. While women were expected to assume a more private and domestic role in this idea(l) of the nation, many women wrote their way into the American public, regardless. In this class we will engage with different forms of such writing (novels, critical essays, periodical fragments, short stories etc.) and the way it grapples with and challenges constructions of womanhood and authoring. Our readings will include, but are not limited to, Judith Sargent Murray's "On the Equality of the Sexes" (1790) and Sukey Vickery's *Emily Hamilton* (1803).

Master

Modul A

32110 Hannah Spahn

1776/2026: The American Revolution at 250 (Grundlagenvorlesung)

Wed 12-14 h, room 201

“What do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American War?” In a letter from 1818 that has since become famous, John Adams firmly answered his second question in the negative, defining the “real American Revolution” as a “radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affection of the people” that had taken place in their “minds and hearts” before the outbreak of military hostilities. Writing in the midst of what became known as the “biographical war”—the first of a series of American culture wars that extends until today—Adams thus classified the American Revolution as an event in cultural and intellectual rather than primarily military history.

In this lecture, we will take Adams’s influential if contested interpretation as a starting point to explore the cultural and intellectual history of the American Revolution from the perspective of its semiquincentennial. How was the founding of the United States experienced and discussed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and how can we understand it now, as the nation’s 250th birthday approaches? We will answer these questions by examining not only the historical “records, pamphlets, newspapers and even handbills” mentioned in Adams’s letter but also other cultural artifacts, including works of fiction, poetry, drama, painting, and architecture. We will seek to get an overview of the major research questions in the historiography of the American Revolution, such as on the changing interpretations of the Declaration of Independence, on the interventions by women, African Americans, and Native Americans, on the roles played by the Great Awakening and religious freedom, by Enlightenment philosophy and British empiricism, and by classical republicanism and analogies to Greek and especially Roman antiquity. With these questions in mind, we will take a look at the later decades of the revolutionary period as well, including the discussions surrounding the Federal Constitution, the emergence of the first party system and the role of the press, the debates about the relationship to the other Atlantic Revolutions, and the controversies about the slave trade, slavery, and the “first emancipation.” Throughout the lecture, we will also reflect on our own historical moment at the end of the first quarter-millennium following 1776, aiming to take stock of competing cultures of commemorating the origins of American liberal democracy.

Requirements and class mechanics:

The lecture course serves as “**Vorlesung**” of Culture-**Module A** (*Amerikanische Ideengeschichte und Theorien amerikanischer Kultur*) in the M.A. program. **Registration:** All participants must be registered via Blackboard *and* Campus Management before the first session. If you cannot register online or cannot attend the first session, please contact PD Dr. Spahn before the beginning of the term. **Requirements:** See Syllabus and Course Description (on Blackboard). **First session:** October 15.

32111 Winfried Fluck

Changing Narratives about America (Hauptseminar)

Wed 14-16 h, room (JFKI) 319

American Studies as a field of study has been established to gain a better understanding of "America," both as an idea and as a nation. It does so by contributing ever new observations and research data. But these single items have to be connected in order to be able to draw larger conclusions. The form in which this is usually done is by inserting a single phenomenon into a larger explanatory pattern for which, in following the historian Hayden White, American studies scholars now use the term narrative. This course will trace some of the main narratives that have been created in order to make sense of American society and culture, starting with the foundational narrative of American studies, that of American exceptionalism, and then going on to recent revisions like the Cold War-narrative, the American Empire-narrative, the frontier-narrative and settler colonialism, the diversity narrative, narratives about the central role of slavery in the formation of the U.S., the 1619 project, but also the Project 2025. In each case, the seminar will focus on the underlying premises about what kind of society the U.S. are and what kind of society they should be. The seminar discussions will be based on a few key texts that are available on Blackboard.

Credits:

To receive a participation credit in this course, a 10-15 minute presentation is required, plus regular attendance. To obtain a full credit, a term paper (of about 15 pages) on one of the seminar topics or texts is required, plus regular attendance.

Registration:

All participants must be registered via Blackboard and Campus Management. If you cannot register online, please contact the department's secretary Regina Götz (culture@fki.fu-berlin.de); or if you would like to participate, but cannot attend the first session, please contact me (winfried.fluck@fu-berlin.de).

Course Material:

All of the reading material will be posted as PDF documents on Blackboard.

Students are expected to read the main texts for each session. A detailed syllabus will be available on Blackboard at the beginning of the winter semester.

Modul B

32112 Martin Lütke

Reform, Diversity, and Cultural Nationalism in the Age of Romanticism (Grundlagenvorlesung)

Thu 10-12 h, room 340

This lecture course deals with the entanglement of Romanticism, cultural nationalism, and practices of political reform, focusing on documents, debates, and literary works from the period in-between the Jacksonian era and the Civil War. Topics include: "Indian Removal," transcendentalism, the importance of Moby-Dick and the media form of the novel, debates on slavery and national expansion, sentimentalism and the abolitionist imagination, proslavery philosophies, the slave narrative, and other issues.

Requirements and class mechanics:

The lecture course serves as "**Grundlagenvorlesung**" of Culture-Module B in the M.A. program. **Registration:** all participants must be registered via Blackboard and Campus Management before the first session. If you cannot register online, or if you would like to participate, but cannot attend the first session, please contact Dr. Lütke before the beginning of the term.

32113 Alexander Starre

Genre and the American Culture Industries (Hauptseminar)

Wed 10-12, room 319

In the sprawling media ecology of our digital present, genre categories help viewers and readers sort through content and curate custom watchlists and to-read shelves. Genre dynamics often work in two opposing directions: on the one hand, narrative genres like the detective story, the western, or the romance provide creators and audiences with a set of shared rules and structures, thus reinforcing boundary lines between generic conventions and traditions. On the other hand, cultural artifacts often derive unique forms by freely mixing and adapting multiple genres (as seen in recent hybrids such as “docudrama,” “romantasy,” or “eco-dystopia”).

This course seeks to provide three perspectives on genre in American cultural studies: 1) We will study a select number of key texts in genre theory, a broad field of conceptual thinking with important impulses for critical analyses. 2) We will revisit the classic “culture industry” thesis by Adorno and Horkheimer and pair it with more recent media historical and infrastructural insights concerning the evolution of the culture industries in North America in the twenty-first century, with a distinct focus on film and television production as well as literature and the publishing industry. 3) We will cover a (very limited) number of case studies, fusing the analysis of a single work with the cultural, commercial, and social workings of its genre(s). Reading and viewing selections include: the publishing satire/ thriller *Yellowface* (2023) by R.F. Kuang; the romance novel *Seven Days in June* by Tia Williams (2021); the horror movie *Get Out* (2016; written and directed by Jordan Peele); the dystopian office dramedy *Severance* (2022 -).

In the final part of the course, student groups will work on individual projects that further explore the key themes of the course in genre texts of their own choosing.

32114 Martin Lütke

Digital Games and/as Contemporary North American Culture
(Hauptseminar)

Thu 12-14 h, room 340

The object of this seminar is to explore the performances, discourses, and affects that emerge in the context of digital gaming as a cultural practice in the United States (and North America). There is, of course, a longer relevant history of gaming and/as entertainment in North America of relevance, but we will mostly focus on the historical convergence of gaming/play and digitization (or digitality). How do we make sense of gaming in the discipline called (digital) games studies? What are the meaningful contexts for digital gaming (and digital games studies) and what is gaming’s relationship to other media practices and media affordances? Is digital gaming primarily or originally a North American practice and if so, does that even matter? How is gaming related to late capitalism, or neoliberalism, and what are its ideological implications (if there are any)? While we will sideline some exclusively theoretical concerns, the object of this seminar is also to provide students with a language (and a set of tools) to analyze cultural and media practices such as digital gaming. After all, EA might be right: “It’s in the game!”

Modul C

32113 Alexander Starre

Genre and the American Culture Industries (Hauptseminar)

Wed 10-12, room 319

In the sprawling media ecology of our digital present, genre categories help viewers and readers sort through content and curate custom watchlists and to-read shelves. Genre dynamics often work in two opposing directions: on the one hand, narrative genres like the detective story, the western, or the romance provide creators and audiences with a set of shared rules and structures, thus reinforcing boundary lines between generic conventions and traditions. On the other hand, cultural artifacts often derive unique forms by freely mixing and adapting multiple genres (as seen in recent hybrids such as “docudrama,” “romantasy,” or “eco-dystopia”).

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Interdisziplinäre Module

32115 Martin Lütke

MA-Colloquium Culture & Literature

Thu 16-18 h, room 319

The colloquium is designed to support MA students in the processes immediately before and during the writing of their respective theses. So, the overall purpose of the course is to provide you with a space to present potential theses (topics, outlines, arguments, ideas) in whichever state they currently come in. ----- Course requirements: We will discuss course requirements and the syllabus in our first session. In addition to regular attendance, you should be prepared to present a tentative trajectory of your project to get the participation credits.

Graduate School

32120 Frank Kelleter

Theory and Methods in the Study of Culture (Oberseminar)

Tue 14-16 h, 319 (JFKI)

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 9).**