

Masterstudiengang JFKI,

Kultur-Modul C

(*Kulturgeschichte einzelner Medien und ästhetischer  
Darstellungsformen*):

Vorlesung mit integriertem Tutorium

## **Lecture Course C1: American Modernities**

Prof. Dr. F. Kelleter

Tuesday, 16.15 – potentially 18.45 (JFKI 319)  
(Winter Semester 2021/22)

This lecture course deals with American culture between the 1910s and the 1940s: a period that saw the birth of new technologies of production, representation, and destruction, along with far-ranging revolutions in the organization of knowledge. Sociology, ethnology, psychoanalysis, and other disciplines emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as institutionalized modes of theorizing modernity. Many of these “modern” transformations can be studied in a prototypical fashion in US history. Our topics in this lecture course include: early film; the New Immigration; the Hollywood studio system; the Great War and modernist aesthetics (fiction, poetry, drama); the “New Negro” movement and the Harlem Renaissance; radio and New Deal culture; the Southern agrarians and anti-modern modernisms.

The lecture course serves as “**Vorlesung**” of Culture-**Module C** (*Kulturgeschichte einzelner Medien und ästhetischer Darstellungsformen*) in the **M.A. program**. **Registration:** All participants need to be registered on Campus Management by the first session. Because of the pandemic, attendance is limited to 28-30 students. Students registered on Campus Management will be automatically transferred to Blackboard. For further information on the registration process and participation restrictions during the pandemic, see [https://www.jfki.fu-berlin.de/media/JFKI-Teaching\\_Winter21-22\\_GER-ENG.pdf](https://www.jfki.fu-berlin.de/media/JFKI-Teaching_Winter21-22_GER-ENG.pdf)

**Organization:** Note that this course is listed as a three-hour “Vorlesung mit integriertem Tutorium.” The idea is to give us a more flexible time-slot in case of mandatory “Hygienemaßnahmen” (such as checking Corona tests / vaccination status or airing the room midway through a session), but also to provide additional time for Q&A. However, participants will gain credit on the basis of the regular (two-hour) lecture slot (4-6); attendance of the additional academic hour (“tutorial”: 6-7) is optional.

**First session:** October 26 (note: this is the second week of the semester).

26 October 2021

### **Modernization, Modernity, Modernism**

**Suggested Reading/Viewing:** Daniel J. Singal, “Modernist Culture” (*The Oxford Companion to United States History*. Ed. Paul Boyer. Oxford: Oxford UP: 2001, 510-11); *The Crowd* (\*) [MGM, 1928] and/or *Modern Times* (\*) [UA, 1936].

2 November 2021

## Early Cinema

Viewing: Edwin S. Porter, *The Great Train Robbery* (\*); David W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation* (\*).

Reading: Hugo Münsterberg, from *The Photoplay*: “Depth and Movement.”

Suggested Viewing: Henry Lehrman, *The Gangsters* (\*) or another Keystone Kops short; Cecil B. De Mille, *Male and Female* (\*).

Further Suggested (for *The Birth of a Nation*): W.E.B. Du Bois, from *Black Reconstruction*: “The Propaganda of History.”

9 November 2021

## The New Immigration

Reading: Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America”; Mary Antin, from *The Promised Land*: “Introduction,” “Chapter 1. Within the Pale,” “Chapter 9. The Promised Land,” “Chapter 19. A Kingdom in the Slums,” “Chapter 20. Heritage”; Anzia Yezierska, from *Hungry Hearts*: “Wings,” “How I Found America.”

Suggested: Horace Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot”; Anzia Yezierska, “The ‘Fat of the Land’”; Carlos Bulosan, “Be American”; Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot* (\*).

Further Suggested: W.E.B. Du Bois, from *Black Reconstruction in America*: “Back towards Slavery” (selections).

16 November 2021

## Sound Technologies: Hollywood in the 1920s

Viewing: *The Jazz Singer* (\*) [Warner Bros., 1927].

Suggested: *The Sheik* (\*) [Paramount, 1921]; *Sherlock, Jr.* (\*) [Metro, 1924].

23 November 2021

## Modernist Prose (1)

Reading: Gertrude Stein, from *Three Lives*: “Melanctha.”

Suggested: Stein, from *Tender Buttons*: “Objects.”

30 November 2021

## Modernist Prose (2)

Reading: Ernest Hemingway, “Indian Camp,” “In Another Country,” “Hills Like White Elephants,” from *A Farewell to Arms*: chapters 1, 6, 27, 41.

Suggested: Hemingway, “A Natural History of the Dead,” “Now I Lay Me,” “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place”; *The Sun Also Rises* (\*) or *A Farewell to Arms* (\*) completely.

7 December 2021

## Modernist Poetry

Reading: Wallace Stevens, “Of Modern Poetry,” “Anecdote of the Jar”; W.C. Williams, “Portrait of a Lady,” “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “This Is Just to Say.”

Suggested: Ezra Pound, “Canto XLV: With Usura”; Stevens, “The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” “The Idea of Order at Key West”; Williams, “The Young Housewife”; e.e. cummings, “l(a)”; H.D., “Evening”; Marianne Moore, “Poetry.”

14 December 2021

## Modernist Drama

Reading: Susan Glaspell, *Trifles*; Eugene O’Neill, *The Emperor Jones*.

4 January 2022

– **no session** –

11 January 2022

## **The “New Negro” Movement and the Harlem Renaissance**

Reading: Alain Locke, “The New Negro”; Claude McKay, “The Harlem Dancer,” “If We Must Die”; Countee Cullen, “Incident,” “Scottsboro, Too, Is Worth Its Song”; Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “The Weary Blues,” “I, Too,” “Note on Commercial Theater,” “Johannesburg Mines”; Jean Toomer, from *Cane*: “Fern”; Nella Larsen, from *Passing*: chapter 2.

Suggested: George Samuel Schuyler, “The Negro-Art Hokum”; Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”; from W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (selections); Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (\*).

18 January 2022

## **Radio’s New Deal and the New Deal’s Radio**

Reading/Listening: Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Banking Crisis [First Fireside Chat, March 12, 1933].”

Suggested: Herbert Hoover, “On American Individualism”; Roosevelt, “Answering the Critics [Fifth Fireside Chat, June 28, 1934].”

25 January 2022

## **Classical Hollywood (1): The 1930s**

Viewing: *Scarface* (\*) [UA, 1932]; *King Kong* (\*) [RKO, 1933]; *Stagecoach* [UA, 1939]; *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (\*) [UA, 1939].

Suggested: *Freaks* (\*) [MGM, 1932].

Further Suggested: *She Done Him Wrong* (\*) [Paramount, 1933]; *Three Little Pigs* (\*) [MGM/Disney, 1933]; *Gone with the Wind* (\*) [MGM/Selznick, 1939].

1 February 2022

## **Classical Hollywood (2): The 1940s**

Viewing: *The Philadelphia Story* (\*) [MGM, 1940]; *The Maltese Falcon* (\*) [Warner Bros., 1941]; *Casablanca* (\*) [Warner Bros., 1942].

Suggested: *Citizen Kane* (\*) [RKO, 1941]; *Spellbound* (\*) [UA, 1945].

Further Suggested: *Bambi* (\*) [RKO/Disney, 1942]; *The Big Sleep* (\*) [Warner Bros., 1946].

8 February 2022

## **Political Modernism (1): Southern Agrarians, Northern Agitators**

Reading: from *I’ll Take My Stand* by Twelve Southerners: John Crowe Ransom, “A Statement of Principles”; Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*.

Suggested: from *I’ll Take My Stand*: Donald Davidson, “A Mirror for Artists”; Ezra Pound, “Canto XLV: With Usura.”

15 February 2022

## **Political Modernism (2): John Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.* (1930-1938) and Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940)**

Required: Dos Passos, from *The Big Money*: “Newsreel LXVIII,” “The Camera Eye (51),” “Mary French”; Wright, from *Native Son*: “Book 3. Fate.”

**Course Reader (Assigned Readings):** All unmarked texts are included in a Course Reader. The **Course Reader** will be made available before the beginning of the semester as a PDF file on **Blackboard** (go to “Kursmaterial”; you may have to click on “open Course Reader here” to download it; if this doesn’t work, try a different browser: students have reported problems with the Chrome browser). Texts and films marked with an asterisks (\*) are not included in the Course Reader; they will be made available on the reserve shelf in the JFKI library (which may or may not be accessible during the winter term, depending on the further course of the pandemic). Films will be made available if a DVD exists; if not, please watch online. Since these texts are “suggested,” I will not expect that students have accessed or read/watched them; it is fully possible to follow the lectures without them.

**General Course Information:** This course will **not be graded**. The grade of your Module will be identical with the grade received in Module C’s seminar. However, to **gain credit** for this course within Module C, you need to document both your **regular attendance** and your **active attendance** (“regelmäßige und aktive Teilnahme” according to Campus Management). How this can be done is explained below.

**Documentation of Regular and Active Attendance:** To **gain credit** for this course (“aktive und regelmäßige Teilnahme”), you should have been **active in the online discussions of at least six different sessions, either by opening a new thread on our Blackboard “Discussion Board” (“Diskussionsforum”) or by posting a response** in another student’s thread. Threads can be dedicated to your observations on the course material, or they can address ideas and questions that came up during the lectures, or both. You don’t have to compose mini-essays; posts and responses can be tweet-length, if you wish. They need not be longer than a sentence or two.

Alternatively, if you do not want—or cannot—use the “Discussion Board,” you may submit **two one-page informal reflection papers** on two sessions of your choice: one in the first half of the semester (by December 7, 2021), the other before the end of the semester (by February 15, 2022).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, either by e-mail or directly on Blackboard.

**A Note on the Selection of Course Material:** The material for this course has not been selected in order to canonize, celebrate, or condone it. Rather, this is a course in cultural history that analyzes powerful American self-descriptions and self-performances from a non-U.S. perspective. Thus, some canonical sources have been selected precisely *because* they are canonical, i.e., because of their prevailing agency within the cultural system we’re investigating as observers (not contributors). We will read them—and their canonization—critically. Doing so, we will find that studying cultural history can be intense and disturbing. This course assumes that students are able to engage with material that is challenging in its representations and agendas. In fact, engaging with (political or aesthetic) discomfort is a significant part of an American Studies education and an opportunity for research and learning. However, there are some instances where a student may have experienced personal trauma that creates specific triggers for severe emotional distress. If this applies to you, please take responsibility to research all material we will be reading ahead of time, and let me know if you think that studying a particular text would create a significant issue for you—we can then work out alternative arrangements. Among others, the following sessions deal with material that contains depictions of violence, including sexual violence; racist and racist attitudes; abortion; and other potentially sensitive issues: Early Cinema (2 Nov), Sound Technologies (16 Nov), Modernist Prose 1&2 (23/30 Nov), Modernist Drama (14 Dec),

Harlem Renaissance (11 Jan), Classical Hollywood 1 (25 Jan), Political Modernism 1&2 (8 Feb/15 Feb).

**A Note on Language:** I will not voice the N-word (or other racial slurs) in this course, also not when I'm quoting the word visually from a primary source or even when this source text uses the word not as a slur, but as an in-group expression. I would like to ask all non-Black students to follow the same practice. By contrast, the word "negro" has a different semantic history. In many texts in American cultural history up until the 1970s, it is used by US writers of different ethnicities as an accepted term of ethnic identification without overt motivations to voice an insult. As a self-attribution in the poetry of Langston Hughes and the self-naming of the Harlem Renaissance as the "New Negro Movement" (or, earlier, in the writings of authors such as Booker T. Washington, W.E.B Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, which will be discussed in the "Capitalism, Sectionalism, Nationhood" lecture course), the word "negro" is not used as an exclusive in-group marker, but as an unmarked expression in accordance with the political parlance of the day. Therefore, I will quote the word whenever it occurs but will not use it as a descriptive term myself (outside of quotations). To the extent that we're students of communicative history, it is important to understand that the English word "negro" is not completely identical with its German dictionary translation. Both terms, however, and also their French and Spanish equivalents, are ultimately rooted in colonialist discourse. Therefore, if anyone in this course feels personally offended by these quotations, please do not hesitate to let me know and I will try to find individual ways of historicizing our texts without de-historicizing their language.

Regarding the term "Indian," I will largely follow the example of Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, who suggests that we "use 'Indigenous,' 'Indian,' and 'Native' interchangeably .... Indigenous individuals and peoples in North America on the whole do not consider 'Indian' a slur" (*An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, 2014). However, since the term "Indian" originates as a colonialist appellation, I will not use it as a descriptive term myself, but put it in quotation marks or paraphrase it whenever the context requires.

**Electronic Etiquette Policy (for live teaching):** You will not be able to follow an on-campus lecture with undivided attention when you're simultaneously surfing the Web. Laptop, tablet, or mobile phone screens can also be a distraction for other students in the classroom. Therefore, I kindly ask you to take your notes on paper. Only if absolutely necessary, use laptops or tablets for note-taking, and if you do, please go offline. In addition, please turn off all cell phones in the beginning of class. Thank you! *Exception:* students with special needs that can be accommodated by using a laptop or tablet may use all the required devices (offline).

**Online organization (if this course can no longer be taught on campus):** to be announced in case this becomes necessary.