

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)
(Summer Semester 2026)

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 20th century as new modes (and institutions) of theorizing modernity. “Modernity” itself was often perceived and propagated as a distinctly American phenomenon. 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 the New Deal; 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 should be registered via Blackboard and Campus Management by the first session. If you cannot register online, please contact Prof. Kelleter before the beginning of the term. **Requirements and Organization:** See **Syllabus and Course Description** in the “Teaching” section of Prof. Kelleter’s JFKI website or on Blackboard (go to “Kursmaterial”; you may have to click on “open Syllabus here” to download it; if this doesn’t work, try a different browser: students have reported problems with the Chrome browser). Please note that this course is listed as a three-hour “Vorlesung mit integriertem Tutorium.” However, participants will gain credit on the basis of the regular two-hour (4-6) lecture slot; attendance of the additional hour (“tutorial” with further time for Q&A, 6-7) is optional. **First session:** April 14 (in person, no hybrid option).

14 April 2026

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].

21 April 2026

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.”

28 April 2026

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 Yeziarska, from *Hungry Hearts*: “Wings,” “How I Found America.”

Suggested: Horace Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot”; Anzia Yeziarska, “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).

5 May 2026

– **no session** –

12 May 2026

Sound Technologies: Hollywood in the 1920s

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

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

19 May 2026

Modernist Prose (1)

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

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

26 May 2026

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.

2 June 2026

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.”

9 June 2026

Modernist Drama

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

16 June 2026

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. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (selections); Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (*).

23 June 2026

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].”

30 June 2026

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].

7 July 2026

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].

14 July 2026

Political Modernism: 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.”

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. This is an on-campus course; there is no hybrid option.

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 express your observations on the reading 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 to—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 May 26), the other before the end of the semester (by July 14). Reflection papers should not rehearse "facts" about a text or topic (as a Wikipedia entry or Chat-GPT dialogue would) but collect your individual thoughts on it.

If you have any questions, please contact me, either by e-mail or directly on Blackboard.

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" and click on "open Course Reader here" for download; if this doesn't work, try a different browser: students have reported problems with the Chrome browser). Texts and films marked with an asterisk (*) are not included in the Course Reader; they will be made available on the reserve shelf in the JFKI library. 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 having studied them in advance.

Plagiarism: Always indicate your sources, even when you're "only" paraphrasing them. Everything else constitutes plagiarism and is a serious breach of academic ethics that will not only result in immediate failure of this course but can endanger your career as a student at this Institute (and potentially beyond). Please take this issue very seriously, because plagiarism is a severe scholarly offense! This goes for reflection papers as well as other written contributions. To find out more about what constitutes plagiarism, see definitions and examples collected in the *MLA Handbook* (and similar textbooks). Citing AI-generated texts (such as Chat-GPT dialogues) without exact source quotation will be considered plagiarism. All cases of plagiarism involving exchange students will be reported to the student's home institution. There are no exceptions to this rule.

A Note on Workload: I encourage you to do as many of the weekly readings as possible, but I will not monitor if you have done so or not. You can discuss the course material on our Blackboard "Diskussionsforum" / "Discussion Board" at your own pace and convenience. I encourage you to use this forum to engage with each other's reading experiences. I will also be available to answer questions there.

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 influential 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 study and investigate. 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 the 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 racialist attitudes; abortion; and other potentially sensitive issues: Early Cinema (21 April), Sound Technologies (12 May), Modernist Prose 1&2 (19/26 May), Modernist Drama (9 June), Harlem Renaissance (16 June), Classical Hollywood 1 (30 June), Political Modernism (14 July).

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—on a powerpoint slide—from a primary source or even when a 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 to the 1970s, it is used by U.S. writers of different ethnicities as an accepted term of ethnic identification without overt motivations to voice an insult. As a self-attribution in the writings of authors such as Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey (discussed in the “Capitalism, Sectionalism, Immigration” lecture course) or in the poetry of Langston Hughes and the self-naming of the Harlem Renaissance as the “New Negro Movement” (relevant for this 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). In terms of semantic 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 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 a 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 required devices (offline).