

Philipp Kneis, M.A., Potsdam University, Winter Semester 2010/11

Undergraduate Seminar "Introduction to American Culture"

The course provides an introduction to Cultural Studies and American Studies and introduces students to relevant historical and contemporary topics, themes and concepts in American culture such as, for example, "American exceptionalism," "Errand into the Wilderness," "Manifest Destiny," and "Civil Religion," by investigating literary and other roots of American culture. Students will furthermore be introduced to basic academic work: organizing and writing seminar papers including outlining, writing thesis statements, compiling bibliographies and referencing according to the MLA style sheet and preparing and giving oral presentations.

Assessment: is based on active participation, presentations, a response paper (2 pages) and a brief academic essay (5-6 pages). In addition, surprise quizzes and tests will ensure that participants comply with the reading assignments.

Seminar Details: 90 minute sessions, Thursdays, 4:15-5:45 PM

Seminar Plan:

- 1 10/21/10 Introduction: What is American Studies?**
Theories of Culture
Geography: Regions in America
- 2 10/28/10 America Before Columbus**
Concepts of Civilization (e.g. Locke)
Models of Colonization
- 3 11/4/10 American Revolution**
Texts: Magna Carta (Excerpts)
English Bill of Rights (Excerpts)
Declaration of Independence
US Constitution (Excerpts)
- 4 11/11/10 American Religion**
Texts: Bradford, Mayflower Compact
Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (City upon a Hill)
Danforth, "A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness"
Bellah, Civil Religion (Excerpts)
Independent Study Prep: Form 5 Groups
- 5 11/18/10 Independent Study: American Identity**
(no classroom session, you meet individually)
Groups: I: Crèvecoeur, What is an American
II: Thoreau, Resistance to Civil Government
III: Douglass, The Meaning of July 4th for the Negro
IV: Thomas Paine, Common Sense
V: Chief Seattle's Speech
- 6 11/25/10 Manifest Destiny, Indian Removal and the Frontier**
Text: Turner, Frontier Thesis
Project Presentations Preparation
- 7 12/2/10 Project Presentations: American Identity**
5 groups total
- 8 12/9/10 Project Presentations: American Identity**
(continued)

9 12/16/10 Slavery, Civil War and Reconstruction / Cultural Diversity

Texts: Lincoln, Inaugural Address, Emancipation Proclamation
Jefferson Davis, Address to Congress
W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*
Response Paper "American Identity" due Jan 3, 2011

Christmas Break

10 1/6/11 Historical Overview: From Colony to World Power

Colonial Conquests: Mexico, Cuba, Philippines
World Wars I+II, Cold War

Text: Monroe Doctrine

11 1/13/11 Cultural Imagery

Video: *Apocalypse Now* Excerpt / war, iconography

Video: *The Godfather II* Excerpt / immigration, national identity

Video: *300* Excerpt / orientalism, questions of gender

12 1/20/11 A Diverse Society

Segregation, Civil Rights Movement
Questions of Cultural Diversity

Texts: King, "I Have a Dream"

Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"

13 1/27/11 Questions in Cultural Theory

14 2/3/11 Film & Television Analysis, Basics

Text: Postman, *Technopoly* (Excerpt)

15 2/10/11 Conclusion / Contemporary Issues / Essay Topic

Bibliography: General Introduction

Hebel, Udo. *Einführung in die Amerikanistik / American Studies*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2008.

Bibliography: History

Brinkley, Alan. *The Unfinished Nation. A Concise History of the American People*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007.
(and older editions)

Heideking, Jürgen, Ansgar Nünning. *Einführung in die amerikanische Geschichte*. München: C.H. Beck, 1998.

Jennings, Francis. *The Creation of America. Through Revolution to Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Loewen, James W. *Lies My Teacher Told Me. Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York: Touchstone, 2007.

Bibliography: Cultural Theory

Assmann, Jan. *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München: C.H. Beck, 1997.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press, 1977.

Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.

_____. *Literary Theory. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory. An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Foucault, Michel. *Die Ordnung des Diskurses*. Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991. (*L'ordre du discours*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.)

Hall, Stuart: "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In: Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia U P, 1994. 392-403.

Hollinger, David. *Postethnic America. Beyond Multiculturalism*. New York: 1995.

Bibliography: American Indian History and the Frontier

Mann, Charles C. *1491. New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. New York: Vintage, 2005.

Pearce, Roy Harvey. *Savagism and Civilization. A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of Berkeley Press, 1953/1988.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." 1893. C. Merton Babcock. *The American Frontier. A Social and Literary Record*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965. 29-42.

Weatherford, Jack. *Indian Givers. How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World*. New York: Fawcett, 1988. 1-20, 117-149.

_____. *Native Roots. How the Indians Enriched America*. New York: Fawcett, 1991.

Bibliography: Religion and American Society

Bellah, Robert N. "Civil Religion in America." *Dædalus. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1. 1-21.

Boyer, Paul. *When Time Shall Be No More. Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge, London: Belknap/Harvard: 1992.

Danforth, Samuel. "A Brief Recognition of New-Englands Errand into the Wilderness." 1670. Electronic text, ed. Paul Royster. works.bepress.com/paul_royster/5. Retrieved 02/07/10.

Bibliography: Media

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death. Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. 1985. New York: Penguin, 2005.

Bibliography: Diverse Subjects

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 1949. London: Fontana Press, 1993.

Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs and Steel. A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years*. London: Vintage, 1997.

_____. *Collapse. How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. London: Penguin, 2005.