

Dr. Steffen Wöll
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Office Hour: Thursday, 4–5 pm (virtual)

Syllabus

ETHNICITY AND DIVERSITY IN US CULTURE (04-001-1018)
Winter Semester 2021/22
Seminar

Thursday, 1:15–2:45 pm
NSG 115

<https://moodle2.uni-leipzig.de/course/view.php?id=33357>

“A technical white elephant”: Whiteness and (Post-)Racial Representations in US Visual and Material Culture

In his influential study of whiteness, Richard Dyer noted that “[a]s long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as the human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people.” Taking this insight as a point of departure, this seminar explores representations of race and ethnicity in the United States with a focus on visual and material culture. Investigating constructions of whiteness and Otherness and their supposed post-racial dissolution, we will discuss a broad spectrum of sources. These may range from depictions of animals and landscapes, movies about cyborgs or zombies, and visualizations of internal Others in horror films.

Course Materials

All course materials are available on Moodle. Films will be screened at a venue to be determined. Should Covid policies prevent in-person screenings, you will have to purchase/stream the respective film.

Due to ongoing organizational difficulties, my office hours will take place online via Big Blue Button. You may book your appointment on Moodle.

Course Requirements

Participants of the seminar will be assessed based on the following criteria:

Prüfungsvorleistungen

Prüfungsvorleistungen (PVLs) are essential to ensure quality standards in teaching and help students to develop their academic skills. Moreover, they are a central part of a student's performance in class and a mandatory prerequisite for passing the seminar as well as the overall module.

To successfully complete the seminar, students must complete the following assignments:

PVL #1: Response paper (300–400 words) with your reaction to the readings of the 5th session (Light / Photography). Post your writings to the *Session 5 Forum* on Moodle on **November 17 by 3 pm** at the latest so your peers have a chance to read them.

PVL #2: Research proposal (400–500 words) containing your preliminary thesis statement and outline of your final presentation (i.e., *Prüfungsleistung*, see below), to be handed in via email to steffen.woell@uni-leipzig.de. The deadline is **December 15, 3 pm**.

PVLs are graded on a pass/fail basis. **Both PVLs must be passed.** Students who fail a PVL must appear in front of a panel of instructors and convince said panel that they are able to produce a successful result in an assignment of PVL-equivalence. If such a replacement is granted by the panel, students must immediately approach their instructors in order to arrange for an assignment of PVL-equivalence. Late submissions will not be accepted. Extensions will only be granted in cases of illness confirmed by a doctor's certificate.

Prüfungsleistung

The final exam (*Prüfungsleistung*) evaluates your knowledge and skills gained throughout the seminar. It is mandatory for passing not only this course but the overall module. The *Prüfungsleistung* consists of an oral presentation based on one or more topics covered in the seminar. It will be graded by Dr. McCafferty and myself, resulting in a combined grade (50/50). Your presentation should have a clear thesis statement and be argumentative instead of descriptive. It must be based on your own research and analysis of one or more primary and at least three secondary sources. More details will follow in due time.

Code of Conduct

Basic Courtesy

The student-instructor relationship at the department of American Studies is based on mutual respect. This includes muting cell phones before entering the (virtual) classroom. You are welcome to take notes on your laptop, but please refrain from checking your emails, messaging, browsing the internet, or other non-curricular activities.

You are expected to be on time and not leave early as this will disturb the class session and is disrespectful to both the instructor and your peers. If you already know that you will have to leave early, please notify me beforehand. Regular attendance and active participation in discussions are crucial to the success of the seminar. Therefore, you are expected to come to class not only having read the assigned material but also prepared to fully engage in the topic, ask questions about it, offer interpretations, and argue for your particular understanding of the text at hand. Finally, I invite you to freely express and share your opinions, ideas, and questions in class. Academic discourse in the humanities thrives in a culture of open discourse among peers and a diversity of perspectives.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct in which an individual submits or presents the work of another person as their own. Scholarship often builds upon examining and referring to thoughts and writings of others. However, doing so without proper acknowledgment is intellectually dishonest and a form of fraud. When you borrow three or more consecutive words, an original term, or a distinctive turn of phrase, you must enclose the borrowed element in quotation marks to acknowledge your indebtedness. Any instance of plagiarism can have serious professional and legal consequences, including expulsion from the course and subsequent annulment of an academic degree.

Seminar Schedule

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Readings / Notes</i>
1	Oct 21	Introduction	<p>Dyer, Richard. "The Matter of Whiteness." <i>White</i>, Routledge, 1997, pp. 1–40.</p> <p><i>Course overview, requirements, getting to know each other, Q&A</i></p>
2	Oct 28	Difference / Otherness	<p>Hall, Stuart. "The Spectacle of the 'Other'" <i>Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices</i>, edited by Stuart Hall, Sage, 1997, pp. 223–79.</p> <p>Flaharty, Robert J. <i>Nanook of the North</i>. Les Frères Revillon, 1922. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/08/Nanook_of_the_North.webm.</p>
3	Nov 4	Bodies / Movement	<p>Dyer, Richard. "The White Man's Muscles." <i>White</i>, Routledge, 1997, pp. 145–83.</p> <p>Wöll, Steffen. "Bleeding Borders: Space, Blackness, and Hybridity in Jack London's Representations of the American Southwest." <i>Amerikastudien / American Studies</i>, vol. 63, no. 1, 2018, pp. 5–28.</p> <p><i>Optional:</i> Cory Matthews. "Johnson vs Jeffries, and the Racism Surrounding the Fight of the Century." <i>YouTube</i>, May 11, 2018. https://youtu.be/sYxeEI8okIw.</p>
4	Nov 11	Environment / Nature	<p>Weber, Joe and Sultana, Selima. "Why Do So Few Minority People Visit National Parks? Visitation and the Accessibility of 'America's Best Idea.'" <i>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</i>, vol. 103, no. 3, 2013, pp. 437–64.</p> <p>Finney, Carolyn. "Jungle Fever." <i>Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors</i>. University of North Carolina Press, 2014, pp. 32–50.</p> <p><i>Optional:</i> Mills, James Edward. "Here's how national parks are working to fight racism." <i>National Geographic</i>. June 23, 2020. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/national-parks/article/more-diversity-how-to-make-national-parks-anti-racist.</p>

	Nov 17	PVL 1 due by 3 pm	
5	Nov 18	Light / Photography	<p>Dyer, Richard. "The Light of the World." <i>White</i>, Routledge, 1997, pp. 82–144.</p> <p>Aster, Ari. <i>Midsommar</i>. A24, 2019.</p> <p>Slate. "The Racist History of Cartoons." <i>YouTube</i>, January 25, 2018, https://youtu.be/MBo3ghPMJmE.</p>
6	Nov 25	Gender / Sexuality	<p>Carter, Julian B. "Introduction: The Search for Norma." <i>The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940</i>, Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 1–41.</p> <p>Kelly, Casey Ryan. "Incel Rebellion: Fascism and Male Autarky." <i>Apocalypse Man: The Death Drive and the Rhetoric of White Masculine Victimhood</i>, Ohio State University Press, 2020, pp. 83–104.</p>
	Dec 2	No class (Dies academicus)	
7	Dec 9	Food	<p>Short Wave. "Fat Phobia and its Racist Past and Present." <i>NPR</i>, July 21, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/07/20/893006538/fat-phobia-and-its-racist-past-and-present.</p> <p>Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. "'Everything 'Cept Eat Us': The Mouth as Political Organ in the Antebellum Novel." <i>Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century</i>, NYU Press, 2012, pp. 89–122.</p>
	Dec 15	PVL 2 due by 3 pm	
8	Dec 16	Animals	<p>Bullen, Ross. "Race and the White Elephant War of 1884." <i>The Public Domain Review</i>, 2017, https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/race-and-the-white-elephant-war-of-1884.</p> <p>Fielder, Brigitte Nicole. "Animal Humanism: Race, Species, and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionism." <i>American Quarterly</i>, vol. 65, no. 3, 2013, pp. 487–514.</p>

9	Jan 6	Injury / Victimhood	Dyer, Richard. "White Death." <i>White</i> , Routledge, 1997, pp. 207–23. Schumacher, Joel. <i>Falling Down</i> . Alcor Films, 1993.
10	Jan 13	Presentations I	<i>Be sure to check the presentation guidelines on Moodle.</i>
11	Jan 20	Presentations II	
12	Jan 27	Presentations III	
13	Feb 3	Presentations IV	