

RACE & CONSUMPTION

ETHNICITY AND DIVERSITY II



Photo: Jingxi Lau / Unsplash

Dr. Steffen Wöll
Seminar

Moodle



American Studies Leipzig
Summer Term 2024

Monday 1 – 3PM
NSG 305



UNIVERSITÄT
LEIPZIG

SYLLABUS

Course Description

In her essay “Eating the Other” the late bell hooks suggests that “[t]he commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.”¹ The seminar uses these insights as starting points to explore the intersections between consumerism, commodification, race, and ethnicity within the American context.

We will trace the dynamics between difference and commodity culture, aiming to unravel the multifaceted tapestries of conspicuous consumption and symbolic exchange. Starting off by theorizing how ethnic identities are commodified within a capitalist framework, the seminar explores literary consumptions of language by considering dialects and vernacular speech as potential vessels of racial horror. Our analyses will further extend to the metaphorical zombification of consumer culture, food and culinary practices, as well as racialized discourses of domesticity and hygiene.

By addressing the appropriation of African American art and styles for commercial gain, we apply a critical lens to the idea of blackness as a marketplace. The seminar, however, also navigates less explored realms, for instance the junctions of ethnicity and consumption in child’s play and video games. Other topics include the racial boundaries between human and nonhuman animals, body politics, and the consumption of race in true crime contexts.

The seminar explicitly invites a critical discourse about racial commodification and its implications for marginalized communities, giving students nuanced perspectives regarding the challenges of racial consumption in US society. It aspires, ultimately, to cultivate a renewed commitment to these challenges by echoing bell hooks’ caution that through the commodifying logics of the racialized marketplace “the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten.”²

E&D II Seminar Race & Consumption

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<https://moodle2.uni-leipzig.de/course/view.php?id=47596>

Dr. Steffen Wöll

Office Hours

Friday 4 – 5PM
<https://uni-leipzig.zoom.us/my/steffen.woell>

¹ hooks, bell. “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance.” In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 21–39. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015, p. 21.

² Ibid. p. 39.

Objectives

This seminar aims to

- explore the intersections between consumerism, capitalism, race, and ethnicity
- familiarize participants with analytical approaches and theoretical perspectives as part of the methodological plurality of American Studies
- enable students to develop research interests and pursue them in academic debate, research, and writing

Requirements

To earn credits in this seminar, you are expected to

- attend class on a regular basis
- prepare the readings for each session and bring the assigned texts to class
- participate in discussions and group work
- pass the Prüfungsvorleistungen (PVL)
- pass the final exam (Prüfungsleistung, i.e. term paper)

Prüfungsvorleistungen

To be eligible for the final exam, you are required to hand in 2 Prüfungsvorleistungen (PVL). These are meant to prepare you for handing in a successful term paper.

PVL 1 (due **June 9** on Moodle): 300-400 word discussion of preliminary ideas for your paper. Reflect on your interest in the topic, what you want to find out, and possible challenges. Include a minimum of 3 secondary sources in MLA format.

PVL 2 (due **June 30** on Moodle): Preliminary thesis statement followed by a detailed outline of your term paper, including a minimum of 5 secondary sources in MLA format.

Please note:

- During your research journey, topical foci and arguments can (and should) evolve and thus do not have to be identical to those outline in your PVL.
- PVL should only contain your own ideas; plagiarism and/or using ChatGPT (or similar) will lead to failing the seminar.

PVL are graded on a pass/fail basis. Late submissions can only be accepted in case of illness, verified by a doctor's certificate.

Prüfungsleistung

The final exam evaluates your academic progress throughout the semester. It is mandatory for passing not only this course but the entire E&D II module, except for Erasmus students.

The Prüfungsleistung is a Research Portfolio. This format consists of a term paper written in this seminar and an oral presentation given in the accompanying tutorial. Final grades are calculated from the weighted arithmetic mean of the paper and presentation. The presentation is given a single weighting while the paper is given a double weighting.

The term paper is due on **September 1, 2024**. Details are available in a separate document.

Erasmus

Erasmus students may earn either 2 ECTS for attending the seminar, or 4 ECTS for successfully completing the PVL and the Prüfungsleistung.

Materials

All readings are available on Moodle. Check the availability of films on Netflix or other streaming services if you plan to watch them on your own schedule. Films will be screened via Zoom at the times specified below.

Code of Conduct

This seminar enforces the American Studies Leipzig code of conduct (see <https://www.philol.uni-leipzig.de/en/institute-for-american-studies/studying/study-programs>).

Trigger Warning

Academic practice in the humanities thrives in a culture of open debate among diverse perspectives. Be aware that we will engage with a wide spectrum of concepts and ideas, some of which might be viewed as controversial or hurtful.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious form of academic misconduct in which an individual submits or presents the work of another person as their own. Scholarship often relies on 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 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.

Schedule

1	Apr 8	Introduction	<p>Overview, Requirements, Introductions, Q&A</p> <p>Please be prepared to introduce yourself and your research interests. Also think about what you expect from the seminar.</p> <p>Pitcher, Ben. Consuming Race, ch. 1</p>
2	Apr 15	Theories of Racial Consumption	<p>hooks, bell. Eating the Other</p> <p>Pitcher, Ben. Consuming Race, ch. 2</p>
3	Apr 22	Dialect, Vernacular, and Racial Horror	<p>Lovecraft, H.P. The Shadow over Innsmouth</p> <p>Wöll, Steffen. The Horrors of the Oriental Space and Language in H.P. Lovecraft's "The Shadow over Innsmouth"</p>
4	Apr 29	Slaves to the Mall: Zombie Shoppers	<p>Romero, John. Dawn of the Dead [screening Apr 28, 8.15PM]</p> <p>Briefel, Aviva. "Shop 'Til You Drop!": Consumerism and Horror</p> <p>Ahmad, Aalya. Gray Is the New Black</p>
5	May 6	Ingesting the Other: Food & Drink	<p>Pitcher, Ben. Consuming Race, ch. 5</p> <p>Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. "Everything 'Cept Eat Us": The Mouth as Political Organ in the Antebellum Novel</p>
6	May 13	Clean Deal: Domesticity & Hygiene	<p>Highway, Tomson. Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing</p> <p>McClintock, Anne. Soft-Soaping Empire</p>
No class on May 20 (Pentecost)			

7	May 27	Blackness as Marketplace	<p>Fogarty, Elizabeth. The Hyper-Materialistic Occupation of Hip-Hop</p> <p>Cherid, Maha Ikram. "Ain't Got Enough Money to Pay Me Respect": Blackfishing, Cultural Appropriation, and the Commodification of Blackness</p>
8	Jun 3	Child's Play	<p>Foster, Harve. Song of the South [screening Jun 2, 8.15PM]</p> <p>Pitcher, Ben. Consuming Race, ch. 6</p>
PVL 1 due June 9			
9	Jun 10	Playing the West	<p>MECC. The Oregon Trail (1990 PC version) [play multiple times]</p> <p>Gameloft. The Oregon Trail (2023 flyer)</p> <p>Wills, John. Pixel Cowboys and Silicon Gold Mines</p>
10	Jun 17	Plants, Stones, and Animals	<p>Pitcher, Ben. Consuming Race, ch. 7</p> <p>Navarro, Marilisa C. Radical Recipe</p>
11	Jun 24	Body Politics: Sex & Death	<p>London, Jack. Molokai photo album</p> <p>London, Jack. Koolau the Leper</p> <p>Barrera, Magdalena. Hottentot 2000</p>
PVL 2 due June 30			
12	Jul 1	Prime Time Crime	<p>Griffith, D.W. Birth of a Nation (excerpts)</p> <p>Liebler, Carol M. Me(di)a Culpa?</p>
Term Paper due September 1			