

# ETHNICITY AND DIVERSITY IN US CULTURE

*Visual Discourses of Race  
and Ethnicity*

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## MOODLE

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## OFFICE HOUR: FRIDAY 2-3PM

UNI-LEIPZIG.ZOOM.US/MY/  
STEFFEN.WOELL

MONDAY  
1-3PM  
NSG 310



Dr. Steffen Wöll

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Office Hour: Friday 2-3pm via [Zoom](#)

Ethnicity and Diversity in US Culture (04-001-1018)

Winter Term 2023/24

Monday 1-3pm, NSG 320, [Moodle](#)

## Visual Discourses of Race and Ethnicity

The Afro-Caribbean philosopher Frantz Fanon begins his seminal essay "The Fact of Blackness" (1952) by stating that "I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things [...] and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects." As a new generation of digital natives moves the cultural pendulum ever closer towards an all-encompassing on-screen media consumption, visual discourses increasingly shape and structure our perspectives on social and cultural realities. While definitions of subjects and objects are rewritten in this process, new challenges and boundaries emerge. This seminar explores how visual discourses past and present impact understandings of race and ethnicity in the United States. We will ask how paintings, maps, photographs, films, material artifacts and other visual texts shape debates related to identity, objectification, representation, and power.

Through a series of case studies and accompanying readings, we will examine how race and ethnicity are constructed, negotiated, and contested in a variety of different forms. Topical focal points of the seminar include the aesthetic vocabularies of representation, the role of images in contexts of racial oppression, resistance, and liberation, the relationships between visual culture and social justice, as well as the possibilities and limitations of visual media as tools for political intervention. We will also consider the ways in which social media, digital technologies, and so-called artificial intelligence are impacting the consciousness and agency of minorities, and what these developments may mean for future politics of identity and representation.

## Course Objectives

This seminar aims to familiarize participants with key aspects of ethnicity and diversity in US society and culture with the goal to

- A. **explore** the intersections between visual culture, representation, race, and ethnicity
- B. **familiarize** participants with analytical approaches and theoretical perspectives as part of the methodological plurality of American Studies
- C. **develop** research interests and pursue them in academic debate, research, and writing

## Requirements & Grading

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*)

### Prüfungsvorleistungen (PVL)

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

- **PVL #1** (due January 7 on Moodle): 300-400 word discussion of preliminary idea(s) for your term paper. Explain your interest in researching the topic, what you want to find out, as well as possible challenges. Include a minimum of 2 secondary sources, MLA format.
- **PVL #2** (due January 28 on Moodle): Preliminary thesis statement and detailed outline of your term paper, including a minimum of 4 secondary sources.

- Please note:
  - During your research journey, topical foci and arguments can (and should!) evolve and thus do not have to be identical to your paper.
  - PVL should only contain your own ideas.
  - **Plagiarism and/or using ChatGPT** (or similar tools) will lead to failing and a panel investigation into the offense.

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 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 March 17, 2024** on Moodle. Detailed instructions are available in a separate document.

## ECTS

Erasmus students can earn 2 ECTS for attending the seminar, or 4 ECTS for completing the entire E&D module.

## Course Materials

All readings are available on Moodle. Check the availability of films on Netflix or other subscription 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 & Trigger Warning

This seminar enforces the American Studies Leipzig code of conduct (see [https://americanstudies.uni-leipzig.de/curriculum/code\\_of\\_conduct](https://americanstudies.uni-leipzig.de/curriculum/code_of_conduct)). Academic practice in the humanities thrives in a culture of open debate among diverse perspectives. Please 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	Oct 9	<b>Introduction</b>	<p>Overview, Requirements, Personal Introductions, Q&amp;A</p> <p>Be prepared to introduce yourself and your research interests. Think about what you expect to learn in the seminar</p> <p>Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other'" in <i>Representation</i> (1997)</p>
2	Oct 16	<b>Photographing Blackness</b>	<p>Smith, "Introduction" in <i>Photography on the Color Line</i> (2004)</p> <p>Blackwood, "Fugitive Obscura: Runaway Slave Portraiture and Early Photographic Technology" in <i>American Literature</i> 81.1 (2009)</p>
3	Oct 23	<b>Black Cinema</b>	<p>Singleton, <i>Boyz n the Hood</i> (1991) [Screening Oct 22, 8.15pm via Zoom]</p> <p>Boylorn, "From Boys to Men: Hip-Hop, Hood Films, and the Performance of Contemporary Black Masculinity" in <i>Black Camera</i> 8.2 (2017)</p>
4	Oct 30	<b>Indigenous Perspectives</b>	<p>Wöll, "Violence Through Empathy: George Catlin's Native American West" in <i>The West and the Word</i> (2020)</p> <p>Carocci, "Textiles of Healing: Native American AIDS Quilts" in <i>Textile</i> 8.1 (2010)</p>
5	Nov 6	<b>Picturing 'Real Indians'</b>	<p>Diamond, <i>Reel Injun</i> (2009) [Screening Nov 5, 8.15pm via Zoom]</p> <p>Aleiss, "Savagery on the Frontier" in <i>Making the White Man's Indian</i> (2005)</p>
	Nov 13	No class – I'm at a conference in Cairo	

6	Nov 20	<b>Asian American Visions I</b>	Bui, <i>The Best We Could Do</i> (2017)  Kleinen, "Framing 'the Other': A Critical Review of Vietnam War Movies and Their Representation of Asians and Vietnamese" in <i>Asia Europe Journal</i> 1.3 (2003)
7	Nov 27	<b>Asian American Visions II</b>	Spiegelmann, <i>In the Shadow of No Towers</i> (2004)  Khalid, "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror" in <i>Global Change, Peace &amp; Security</i> 23.1 (2011)
	Dec 4	No class (Dies Academicus)	
8	Dec 11	<b>Chicano/a Expressions</b>	Ramirez, "Crimes of Fashion: The Pachuca and Chicana Style Politics" in <i>Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism</i> 2.2 (2002)  Tovares, "American Experience: Zoot Suit Riots" (2002), <a href="https://youtu.be/pWyviiYaMig">https://youtu.be/pWyviiYaMig</a>
9	Dec 18	<b>Queering Visual Cultures</b>	Arroyo & Graham, <i>Blackwater</i> (2022)  White, "My Queer eBay" in <i>Everyday eBay: Culture, Collecting, and Desire</i> (2006)
PVL #1 due on January 7			
10	Jan 8	<b>Views from the Diaspora</b>	Mirzoeff, "The Multiple Viewpoint: Diaspora and Visual Culture" in <i>The Visual Culture Reader</i> (2002)  Mani, "Undressing the Diaspora" in <i>South Asian Women in the Diaspora</i> (2003)

11	Jan 15	<b>Visions of Whiteness</b>	<p>Bean, <i>The Believer</i> (2001) [Screening Jan 14, 8.15pm via Zoom]</p> <p>Dyer, "Coloured White, Not Coloured" in <i>White</i> (1997)</p>
12	Jan 22	<b>Visual Activism and Social Justice</b>	<p>Bryan-Wilson et al., "Editors' Introduction: Themed Issue on Visual Activism" in <i>Journal of Visual Culture</i> 15.1 (2016)</p>
PVL #2 due on January 28			
13	Jan 29	<b>Virtual Visuals</b>	<p>Kung, "Should Your Avatar's Skin Match Yours?" in NPR <i>Code Sw!tch</i>, <a href="https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/08/31/430057317/should-your-avatars-skin-match-yours">https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/08/31/430057317/should-your-avatars-skin-match-yours</a></p> <p>Giannini et al., "Digital Art and Identity Merging Human and Artificial Intelligence: Enter the Metaverse" in <i>Proceedings of EVA London 2022</i></p>