

Masterstudiengang JFKI,

Kultur-Modul C

*(Kulturgeschichte einzelner Medien und ästhetischer  
Darstellungsformen):*

Vorlesung

**Lecture Course C2:  
American Culture after World War II**

Prof. Dr. F. Kelleter

Tuesday, 16.15 – potentially 18.45 (JFKI 319)

(Summer Semester 2025)

Emerging from World War II as a world power, the United States faced numerous problems of cultural self-definition in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Cold War produced not only an ideology of international leadership but also new anxieties about America's social identity and the nation's changed position in the world. Topics discussed in this lecture course include: the arrival of a postindustrial economic order, the decline of New Deal liberalism, postmodernist aesthetics, the New Hollywood, and the interrelated emergence of the New Left and the New Right. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, many of these developments have been radicalized under the conditions of military hegemony, globalized capitalism, corporate anti-statism, neoliberal governance, and catastrophic ecological transformations. Our lecture course focuses on select phases and moments of cultural production between 1945 and 2025, when American novels, poems, films, and TV shows often defined the state of the art in their respective fields. We will concentrate on literary sources (especially poetry and fiction), sociological writings, political documents, cinema, television, and other cultural fields.

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 15.

15 April 2025

## **Cold War Culture**

Assigned Reading/Viewing: none.

Suggested (Voluntary) Background Reading: from *The Enduring Vision*, ed. Paul Boyer et al., “America at Midcentury, 1952-1960” (\*), “A Time of Upheaval, 1968-1974” (\*); David Riesman, “The Suburban Sadness.”

Suggested Viewing: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (dir. Don Siegel) (\*); *The Manchurian Candidate* (dir. John Frankenheimer) (\*).

22 April 2025

## **In the Post-Industrial Bathroom**

Assigned Reading: David Riesman, from *The Lonely Crowd*: “Changes in the Role of the Parents”; J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*: chapters 1-4, 6-9, 12, 16, 18, 21-23, 25, 26; John Updike, “Separating.”

Suggested Reading: J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, entire novel (\*).

29 April 2025

## **Confessional Poetry and the Politics of Identity**

Assigned Reading: Robert Lowell, “Inauguration Day: January 1953,” “Memories of West Street and Lepke,” “Skunk Hour”; Sylvia Plath, “Lady Lazarus”; Adrienne Rich, “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” and from *Of Woman Born*: section 2 (selections).

Suggested Reading: Robert Lowell, “Sailing Home from Rapallo,” “Man and Wife,” “To Speak of Woe That Is in Marriage,” “For the Union Dead”; Betty Friedan, from *The Feminine Mystique* (selections); Sylvia Plath, “Daddy”; Anne Sexton, “Sylvia’s Death”; Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck.”

Note: Please see paragraph on the Selection of Course Material (below).

6 May 2025

## **From Beat to Pop**

Assigned Reading: Allen Ginsberg, “A Supermarket in California,” “Howl,” “Footnote to ‘Howl’”; Norman Mailer, from “The White Negro”: sections I, II, V, VI; Joan Didion, “Slouching towards Bethlehem”; Andy Warhol, from *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from A to B and Back Again)*: chapter 6 “Work” (selections), chapter 15 “Underwear Power.”

Note: Please see paragraph on the Selection of Course Material (below).

13 May 2025

## **From the “New Hollywood” to the Blockbuster Era**

Assigned Viewing: *Bonnie and Clyde* (dir. Arthur Penn) (\*); *The Exorcist* (dir. William Friedkin) (\*); *Jaws* (dir. Steven Spielberg) (\*); *Taxi Driver* (dir. Martin Scorsese) (\*).

Suggested Viewing: *Easy Rider* (dir. Dennis Hopper) (\*); *Wanda* (dir. Barbara Loden) (\*); *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (dir. Melvin Van Peebles) (\*); *The Godfather* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola) (\*); *The Godfather Part II* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola) (\*); *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (dir. Miloš Forman); *Three Days of the Condor* (dir. Sydney Pollack) (\*); *Network* (dir. Sidney Lumet) (\*); *Star Wars* (dir. George Lucas) (\*); *The Deer Hunter* (dir. Michael Cimino) (\*); *First Blood* (dir. Ted Kotcheff) (\*).

Note: Please see paragraph on the Selection of Course Material (below).

20 May 2025

## **The “Liberal” Non-Consensus: Civil Rights, Cultural Radicalism, Lifestyle Politics**

Assigned Reading: *Brown v. Board of Education at Topeka*; Martin Luther King, “Address to the March on Washington”; Malcolm X, “Message to the Grass Roots,” “The Ballot or the Bullet”; Black Panther Party, “The Ten-Point Program”; Stokely Carmichael, “What We Want”; Chicago Office of SNCC, “We Must Fill Ourselves with Hate for All White Things”; Eldridge Cleaver, “Open Letter to Stokely Carmichael”; The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement”; Debby D’Amico, “To My White Working-Class Sisters.”

Suggested Reading: Tom Wolfe, from *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*: “Radical Chic” (selections); Winfried Fluck, “The Humanities in the Age of Expressive Individualism and Cultural Radicalism.”

27 May 2025

## **Identity Aesthetics (1): African American Culture and Literature, 1950s-1960s**

Assigned Reading: Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*: “Prologue,” “Chapter I. [Battle Royal],” “Epilogue”; Gwendolyn Brooks, “We Real Cool”; Amiri Baraka, *Slave Ship*; Ron Karenga, “Black Cultural Nationalism.”

Suggested Reading: Langston Hughes, “Harlem”; Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, entire novel (\*).

Note: Please see paragraph on the Selection of Course Material (below).

3 June 2025

## **Identity Aesthetics (2): Jewish American Culture and Literature, 1950s-1970s**

Assigned Reading: Saul Bellow, “Looking for Mr. Green”; Cynthia Ozick, “The Shawl”; Philip Roth, from *Portnoy’s Complaint*: chapters “The Most Unforgettable Character I’ve Met,” “Whacking Off,” “The Jewish Blues” (selections), “In Exile,” “Punchline.”

Suggested Reading: Philip Roth, *Portnoy’s Complaint*, entire novel (\*).

Suggested Viewing: *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen) (\*).

Note: Please see paragraph on the Selection of Course Material (below).

10 June 2025

## **New York Poetry and Abstract Expressionism**

Reading: John Cage, “25 Mesostics Re and Not Re Mark Tobey”; Robert Creeley, “I Know A Man”; Frank O’Hara, “Personism: A Manifesto,” “Having a Coke with You,” “A Step Away from Them,” “The Day Lady Died”; Kenneth Koch, “Permanently,” “The Circus” (1975 version); Bernadette Mayer, “Birthday Sonnet for Grace.”

Suggested: John Ashbery, “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror”; Kenneth Koch, “Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams”; Andy Warhol, *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from A to B and Back Again)*: chapter 10 “Atmosphere” (selections).

17 June 2025

## **Postmodernism**

Assigned Reading: Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (\*); Leslie Fiedler, “Cross the Border—Close the Gap.”

Suggested Reading: Thomas Pynchon, “Entropy”; Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context”; Frederic Jameson, “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.”

24 June 2025

## **Beyond Postmodernism**

Assigned Reading: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (\*), especially Chapter One.

Suggested Reading: Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (\*); Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference It Makes”; Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”

Note: Please see paragraph on the Selection of Course Material (below).

1 July 2025

## **Television in the Digital Age (early 2000s)**

Assigned Viewing: *The Sopranos* (\*): I/5 (“College”), VI/2.9 (“Made in America”).

Suggested Viewing: selections from (\*) *Twin Peaks*, *Seinfeld*, *Lost*, *The Wire*, and/or *Orange Is the New Black*.

Suggested Reading: Frank Kelleter, *Serial Agencies: “The Wire” and Its Readers* (\*); “Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality.”

8 July 2025

## **Conservatism? (Neoliberalism, Anticommunism, Movement Conservatism, Neo-Conservatism, Tea Party Populism)**

Assigned Reading: Friedrich Hayek, from *The Road to Serfdom*: “Introduction”; Ayn Rand, from *The Virtue of Selfishness*: “Introduction”; Milton Friedman, from *Capitalism and Freedom*: “Introduction,” “Conclusion”; Ronald Reagan, “Speech on Behalf of Barry Goldwater”; Lewis F. Powell, Jr., “Confidential Memorandum: Attack of American Free Enterprise System”; Charles Krauthammer, “In Defense of Democratic Realism”; Ron Paul, “The Neoconservative Empire”; Dick Arme & Matt Kibbe, “A Tea Party Manifesto”; Sarah Palin, from *Going Rogue*: “Epilogue.”

Suggested Reading: Thomas Frank, from *What’s the Matter with Kansas?*: “The Two Nations” (selections).

15 July 2025

## **Long Trumpism**

Assigned Reading: Publius Decius Mus [Michael Anton], “The Flight 93 Election,” “Restatement on Flight 93”; Michael Wolff, “Ringside With Steve Bannon at Trump Tower”; “Stephen Bannon: Core Of Trump’s Platform Is ‘Deconstruction Of The Administrative State’” (transcript and video); May 2017 White House Memo [Richard Higgins], “POTUS & Political Warfare”; Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The First White President”; Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, from *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*: “Introduction: Black Awakening in Obama’s America,” “The Political Economy of Racism,” “White Supremacy for Some, Not Others”; Sam Kriss: “Very Ordinary Men: Elon Musk and the Court Biographer.”

Suggested Listening/Reading/Viewing: Merle Haggard, “Okie from Muskogee” (song, 1969 version); Michelle Alexander, from *The New Jim Crow*: “Introduction”; Ava DuVernay, *13th* (\*) (Netflix documentary).

**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. These contributions can collect 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 27), the other before the end of the semester (by July 15). 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 sexuality; violence, including sexual violence; suicide; addiction and substance abuse; racial language and racism; or other potentially sensitive issues: Confessional Poetry (29 April), Beat Poetry (6 May), The New Hollywood (13 May), African-American Literature 1950s-60s (27 May), Jewish American Literature 1950s-70s (3 June), Beyond Postmodernism (24 June), Television (1 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 W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King or in the poetry of Langston Hughes and the self-naming of the Harlem Renaissance as the “New Negro Movement,” 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). We will address the word's increasingly critical usage, and its subsequent substitution by (often semantically related) terms in the writings of people such as Malcolm X and Angela Davis. 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).