

Picturing America

Domestic and Global Aspects of US Media Culture. 5th Annual Students Conference, May 19-21, 2005

Call For Papers

America constitutes not only a geographic entity; it is an idea that is communicated throughout the nation as much as all over the globe. The American nation has been formed not just through forces political and economic. Since its very beginning, the idea of the nation-to-be was strongly influenced by philosophical and cultural discourses. The American Revolution created an entity that would call on the responsibility of each citizen to help shape the nation, to contribute rather than just to be governed. Such participatory democracy, however, heavily relies upon an educated public able to partake in the continuing processes of creation, maintenance and re-creation required by democracy.

Based on the assumption of the specific nature of US-American democracy, our Fifth Annual Students Conference will take a look at US-American Media and their functions in the production of cultural knowledge at home and abroad. It will particularly address the subsequent issues: How is the democratic system communicated through the media that picture America? How are divergent voices integrated or included? If we look at policy shifts, at moments of transition and rediscovery, be they violent or peaceful, how are they accompanied or prefigured by the media? How do we judge the role of cultural touchstones all kinds of media, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Birth of a Nation*, the *frontier thesis* and the *Western*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, Jazz and Creole Culture or *Star Trek*? Is the abundance of law-and-order texts just a coincidence in a jury-reliant justice system? What role do more recent shows like *The West Wing* play in a democratic system?

What happens once texts that are imminent to a specific culture are transmitted globally? When John Wayne meets Karl May and Sergio Leone?

If you are interested in holding a 20-minute presentation, please submit a short abstract by the middle of April, 2005.

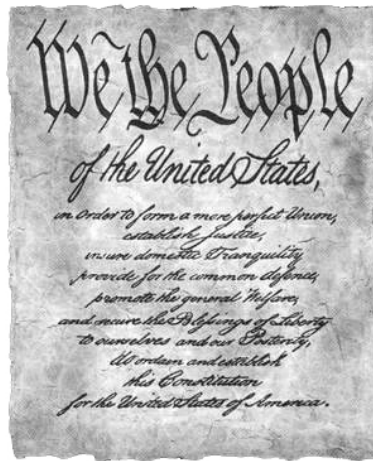
A current list of topics already covered, the preliminary program as well as further information can be found at the conference web site:

www2.hu-berlin.de/amerika/projects/picturingamerica

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This conference is sponsored and supported by the American Studies Program and the Fachschaft of the Institute of English and American Studies



When the *Fresh Prince* of Bel Air airs on Egyptian television? When the most widely known American best-seller becomes *Stupid White Men*? When the most patriotic of American movies are the products of German directors?

Moreover, what about constructions of the world "outside", a possible backlash that may be seen in global politics and global institutions being mimicked in movies like *High Noon* or on shows like *Babylon 5*? How are more or less specifically American themes like the frontier and horror films centering on the American nuclear family perceived in radically different cultural structures? How do non-American born American artists differ in their representation of America? How self-reflexive is America, how self-reflexive is Europe about its perceptions of America?

In which way is the emergence of a global culture accompanied by the emergence of global means of cultural production, such as the partial delocalization of texts through the internet, and internationally co-produced franchises like *Farscape* and *James Bond*? Are there differences in fan culture and reception of popular phenomena like *Star Trek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and what happens to such differences when they meet on the internet and in international conferences and conventions? Does America thus provide a global cultural language with enabling as well as overwhelming if not omnipresent structures?

The conference is organized by students of the American Studies Program at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. All students interested in the project are invited to join. The presentation of a paper is not a requirement for participation, so please feel free to come and enjoy exciting papers, interesting discussions and related events.



American Studies