

The Simpsons and American Society, or: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of the Perfect Donut

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Speaker: Dr. Markus Hünemörder, LMU

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"Oh Marge, cartoons don't have any deep meaning. They're just stupid drawings that give you a cheap laugh." Homer Simpson

For once, Homer is wrong. Since its inception 20 years ago, the Simpsons television cartoon show has not only become one of the most iconic products of American popular culture, it is also the most famous and relevant satire of American society, culture, politics, and life in general. While the show works even on its most superficial level as slapstick comedy, every episode is full of allusions to popular culture, history, politics, religion and philosophy that often only become apparent on the second (or third, or fourth) viewing. The Simpsons has commented on everything from American democracy, immigration, feminism, class warfare, racism, and gun control to evangelical Christianity and life after death. No celebrity can really be considered famous until he or she had a guest appearance on the show. This talk will focus on some relevant (and funny) examples of how to read the Simpsons as social and political satire. Don't have a cow, man!