

The Simpsons: Satire and American Society

Teacher Seminar, 19 February 2009

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Organizer: Amerika-Haus-Bibliothek, B.A.Z. Amerika-Haus

George H.W. Bush once said he wanted an America that is more like the Waltons and less like the Simpsons. Bart promptly answered: „Hey, we’re like the Waltons. We’re praying for an end to the depression, too.“ Later Bush became the target of an entire Simpsons episode. Since their first appearance on the Tracey Ullman show twenty years ago, Matt Groening’s yellow-skinned TV family have become an American institution: 20 seasons, more than 400 episodes and one major motion picture make the Simpsons one of the successful products of American popular culture. The fascination of the show comes from the fact that it works on many different levels: slapstick comedy, social and political satire, and even philosophical reflection. Every episode is full of obvious and obscure allusions to all areas of American culture. This seminar will, based on select episode clips, demonstrate how the Simpsons can teach us about American culture, politics, and society.

13.00 Part 1: Background

- The History of *The Simpsons*
- *The Simpsons* in the US, Germany, and Worldwide
- A Cartoon as Satire?
- The Many Layers of *The Simpsons*

14.30 Coffee Break

15.00 Part 2: Selected Issues on *The Simpsons*

- Politics
- Immigration
- Popular Culture
- Gay Rights
- Gun Control

17.00 End