

American History in Paintings, Photographs, and Monuments

Teacher Seminar, 11 February 2011

Speaker: Prof. Dr. Udo Hebel, Universität Regensburg

Organizer: Amerika-Haus-Bibliothek, B.A.Z. Amerika-Haus
Registration fee: € 10

Since the mid-1990s, two so-called 'theoretical turns' have had a strong impact on American Studies research and teaching: the visual turn and the spatial turn. In consequence, visuals and spaces of different kinds have been analyzed as specific interpretations and symbolic representations of American histories and ideologies. The seminar will take up these issues and materials and explore their relevance for teaching American cultural history.

In its first part, the seminar will present a sample of American paintings and photographs from the late eighteenth century through the immediate present and discuss their specific renditions of American histories and cultures. The selection will include paintings of foundational moments in American history, nature paintings and photographs as expressions of national American grandeur, decorative prints and popular posters from Currier & Ives to Norman Rockwell as commercially successful propagations of American ideologies, iconic photographs ('Schlagbilder') from the Civil War until recent presidential photographs, and inter pictorial sequences as manifestations of the power of political and cultural iconographies.

In its second part, the seminar will turn to the construction of American identities and memories in American public spaces. The celebration of a national history and collective memory has been both an official concern and a popular pastime since the very foundation of the U.S. From the prominent platform of the National Mall in Washington, D.C., to the myriad of historical landmarks, monuments, and parks all across the continent and out to Alaska and Hawaii, public spaces have been purposefully designed to commemorate national identities and to display the popular repertoire of U.S. American civil religion. The presentation will trace the increasing pluralization of the national U.S. American landscape of memory and discuss its politics in changing contexts. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, issues of political visibility and public recognition of counter memories and group histories remain as vital and controversial as issues of heritage tourism and the commercialization of public sites of national memory.

Both parts of the seminar will be based on powerpoint presentations but leave ample room for questions and answers.

9 – 10:30 Presentation and Discussion of American Paintings and Photographs as Representations of American History and Culture

ca. 10:30 Coffee Break

11:00 – 13:00 Presentation and Discussion of the Display of American Histories and (National) Memories in Public Spaces