

Veranstalter	Prof. Dr. Astrid Böger
Thema	Freedom Now: An American Ideal Revisited [AA- V4a/b, ENG-13, AA-M5, AA-M14, AA-M15, AA-W]
Art der Veranstaltung	Seminar II
Veranstaltungsnummer	53-570
Zeit	2st., Mo. 10-12
Raum	Phil 1219
Beginn	2.4.12

Course Description:

From its very beginnings, U.S. American culture has hinged on the notion of individual and collective freedom. Thus, freedom from oppression was centrally invoked in the Declaration of Independence (1776). Other core rights including freedom of religion, speech, and the press were written into the U.S. Constitution (1787) providing the basis for legislation to this day. Throughout U.S. history, freedom has remained the most vehemently defended right of American citizens, which has been especially true during times of crisis, as seminally expressed by president Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his “Four Freedoms Speech” delivered in January 1941, in which he assured Americans of their right to freedom including the freedom from want and from fear, thereby seemingly anticipating the U.S.’s entry into World War II less than a year later. Perhaps unsurprisingly, conflicting notions of freedom – and ways to finally achieve it – also dominate the current race for the presidency.

In recent years, freedom has also emerged as a core concern in a number of novels by American authors including Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild* (1996; turned into a film in 2007, directed by Sean Penn), Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006; also turned into a film, in 2010, directed by Ryan Murphy), Joshua Ferris’s *The Unnamed* (2010) and, finally, Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom* (2010). In closely studying these diverse narratives, we will focus on the varying notions of personal and collective freedom that they negotiate: How is the need – the urge – for freedom depicted in each case? What problems are in the way, or the consequence, of the central protagonists’ struggle for freedom? Is freedom shown to be a universal aim or one dependent on specific and highly personal circumstance? And what role does the American landscape play in each case, both in literal and metaphorical terms? In what ways is the search for personal freedom dependent on social factors such as ethnic background, gender and class? Finally, if it is true that ‘freedom narratives’ have been especially prominent at times of crisis, it is worth our while to consider these novels as illuminating gauges of contemporary America in search of a way out.

Course Requirements:

This is a reading-intensive course, and in addition to regular attendance and participation, thorough preparation of the texts *prior to class* is essential. In order to receive full course credit, students will be expected to give an in-class presentation and write a final term-paper.

All four novels mentioned above have been ordered at the campus bookstore.

Sprechstunde während der Vorlesungszeit:	Mo 16-17 und nach Vereinbarung
Sprechstunden während der vorlesungsfreien Zeit:	Termine werden noch bekannt gegeben