

Veranstalter	Julia Lange
Thema	U.S. Presidential Election 2016: Politics and Poetics [ENG-7/a, AA-V4a/b, ENG-13, AA-MA3, AA-MA4, AA11, LAA10, LAA13, AA-W, AA-WB]
Art der Veranstaltung	Seminar II
Veranstaltungsnummer	53-567
Zeit	Mi 14-16
Raum	Phil 1269
Beginn	6. April 2016

Course description:

On November 8, 2016, a new US president will be elected. With the primaries well under way, this spring/summer is a perfect time to reflect on the election campaigns and their cultural emplotment. Although the focus of the seminar is on the presidential race 2016, we will widen the scope of our analysis and illuminate the US electoral process from a historical perspective. The framework of American cultural studies will serve as our primary methodological tool to explore the rhetorical cultures of US elections in their verbal and visual dimensions.

We will begin with the genre of US campaign memoirs and ask which narrative strategies of self-fashioning former and current presidential candidates employed so as to pave the way for their electoral success. On the basis of (excerpts from) autobiographies by Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, Ted Cruz, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders, we will explore how the candidates' personal life stories resonate with the national narrative. Questions that will preoccupy us during the seminar include: How does the autobiographical self-fashioning of the presidential candidates align with key American mythologies and ideologies such as US exceptionalism and American individualism? How do tropes of American confessional discourse and tropes of renewal and reinvention on both personal and national levels materialize in the campaign memoirs? Last but not least, how are broader social concerns such as race relations and the fight for gender equality reflected in the (would-be) presidents' texts?

Besides campaign memoirs, we will look at other typical campaign communication media such as campaign speeches and advertisements. Special emphasis will be placed on so called "attack ads", a specific type of ad launched by political opponents as strategic counter-narratives with the aim of deconstructing a candidate's carefully crafted public self-image by means of "other-fashioning" (Olsen). Not only, but also, because there is a fair chance of a woman being elected president for the first time in US history, we will explore how, in accordance with larger trends in the status of women in society, the role and rhetoric of first ladies changed throughout the decades. Our investigation of the institution of first lady as a "site" for the symbolic negotiation of female identity will proceed from a diachronic perspective. The historical survey will include Eleanor Roosevelt, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, Hillary Clinton, and Michelle Obama.

Finally, we will address the aesthetic rendering of the elections in American film and television series. Campaign films such as *Primary Colors* (1998) and *Game Change* (2012), and TV series such as *The West Wing*, *Commander in Chief*, *House of Cards*, *Political Animals*, *Madam Secretary*, and *Veep* will serve as case studies for our examination of the filmic representation of campaigning and elections, i.e. candidates, voters, and the interplay of film aesthetics and campaign politics.

Course requirements:

Regular participation, short oral presentation, term paper.

