– Current Issues of American Culture in the EFL-Classroom – Annual American Studies Committee Meeting 2017
Leucorea Foundation, Lutherstadt Wittenberg
November 23–25, 2017
sponsored by the U.S. Embassy Berlin and the Muhlenberg Center for American Studies

ABSTRACTS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Lecture: "Searching for the Truth: The New Social Media Environment in the USA"

Jeremy D. Mayer (Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University)

Social media is having a number of effects on American politics and society. In what ways is it different from prior methods of political communication? Some have suggested it has begun to corrode the ability of our society to have shared truths, to agree on what a fact is. It also appears that Facebook and Twitter were also vectors via which Russia attempted to influence the American presidential election. These and other issues will be examined.

Reading: "Donkey Hotey Saving America--Maybe"

Michael Lederer (Berlin)

What happens between that first instinct to write and a ready manuscript? The writer must choose subject, then decide on form: fact or fiction, poetry, short story, novel, stage play, screenplay, other? He/she must settle on tone: comic, tragic, both, neither? Is the principle aim to teach, entertain, persuade, inspire, confess, redeem, titillate, impress, gain fame or fortune, achieve some measure of immortality? Is any one of those so very different than the others? And what role does nationality play in all this? We will explore these questions using the writer's work-in-progress for illustration.

Lecture: "Encountering the Other, in American Literature and in the Classroom: The Pedagogical Value of Travel Texts"

Monica Cure (Biola University, CA)

National identity is a notoriously difficult concept to narrate, always in flux and, in times like ours, often violently contested. American Studies, in particular, thematizes this by the very nature of its inquiry. American travel narratives, both fiction and non-fiction, can serve as a privileged object in this study. Analyzing these texts shows national identity formation in the process, through the dialectic between self and other. Travel narratives from the nineteenth century, post-Civil War, especially yield important meta-commentaries as the United States rose to become a global superpower. Thinking critically about these texts and the questions they raise can help foster a more inclusive learning environment through discussion. Moreover, it also can create the context for various experiential cross-cultural learning projects, or even academic service learning projects.

Lecture: "Worker Rights, the Global Economy and the Politics of Development"

Layna Mosley (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

Economic globalization brings both opportunities and risks to developing (and developed) countries. The opportunity to produce goods for global markets can help to improve economic growth, standards of living and technology in low and middle income countries. But these same opportunities can imperil workers, as developing countries compete to win subcontracts and foreign investment. I will begin with an overview of labor rights and working conditions worldwide; discuss how labor rights might be affected by trade, multinational production and foreign investment; and offer some examples of attempts to govern globalization in ways that protect labor rights.

Workshop I:
"Integration, Pluralism, and Segregation: Kleindeutschland vs. Chinatown, 1860–1880"

Christina A. Ziegler-McPherson (German Maritime Museum Bremerhaven)

Assimilation, integration, segregation, and pluralism are all major themes in American history. This workshop compares and contrasts two immigrant neighborhoods, New York's Kleindeutschland and San Francisco's Chinatown, in the 19th century, and asks what roles assimilation, pluralism, and segregation played in the histories of these two communities. Lesson plans using primary source documents will be shared and discussed.

Workshop II: "Musicians Speak Up! Analyzing Stereotypical Presentations of Donald Trump in Music Video Clips"

Dr. Charlott Falkenhagen (University Jena)

Stereotypes and prejudices have always been used to create and manipulate opinions, to mobilize the masses, and are considered crucial aspects of propaganda. When appearing in political discussions, election campaigns, or political programs they often establish the boundaries between "here" and "there", "us" and "them." The MVCs presented in the workshop are stereotypical Anti-Trump songs taken from the campaign *30 songs, 30 days*. On the one hand they portray Trump as the stereotypical women hater, gun nut or racist, but on the other hand the clips themselves are stereotypical in the way they present Trump on the three different levels of lyrics, visuals and music. Each video also plays with these expectations conforming to a certain stereotype by presenting either musical or visual information contrasting the particular stereotype.
The workshop will provide suggestions for classroom activities that contain the analysis of the visuals (e.g. color, movement, proportions, style) and the analysis of the music (developing new vocab to describe and speak about music, describe musical effects and functions within the MVC). Furthermore, tasks will be developed that enable your students to interpret the relation between visuals and audio in terms of supporting or contrasting the "stereotypical" message.

Lecture: "Never the Oval Office? From Eleanor Roosevelt to Michelle Obama—First Ladies and Their Social and Feminist Agenda"

Dr. Martina Kohl (HU Berlin)

Prompted by the 2016 elections in the United States, women's prospects in U.S. politics have received renewed attention among scholars and politically interested circles. Hillary Clinton, without any doubt one of the—if not *the* most qualified candidates for the Presidency ever, suffered an unexpected defeat on November 9th. Polls, experts, and the candidates were taken by surprise. Only in hindsight do critics claim to have known all along that Hillary Clinton's defeat might have been foreseeable. As a former First Lady, Hillary Clinton belongs to a group of women in U.S. politics that at least have made it into the White House—though not as an elected representative of the administration. As different as these women have been, they all have one thing in common: the chance to shape policy.

Workshop III: "*In English My Name Means Hope*: Contemporary Latin@ Immigration Fiction for the EFL-Classroom"

Nele Rodiek (MLU Halle-Wittenberg)

"In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters," says Esperanza Cordero, the pre-teen Chicana protagonist of Sandra Cisneros' canonical short novel *The House on Mango Street*. The book is a favorite with US-based English teachers focusing classes on multiculturalism and identity formation, and is especially often taught in Middle School by virtue of Cisneros' inclusive stance on language and literature. Cisneros was one of the first Latin@ authors to receive widespread attention and acclaim with the publication of her aforementioned first novel in 1984. Since then, publication rates and interest in Latin@ literature in the US have been on the rise.

The workshop will start off with a brief presentation on the history and present situation of Latin@ immigration to the US and illustrate the immigration group's literary productivity as well as introduce Immigration Fiction as a genre. Subsequently, four text excerpts from the works of three prominent contemporary Latin@ authors, namely Cisneros, Julia Alvarez, and Junot Díaz, will be presented as a basis for the ensuing group work. The texts will be assigned an intermediate or advanced learner's level. We shall explore a variety of exercises how to read and work with these texts and their topics, such as immigration, isolation, and identity formation, and will also be discussing suitable frame topics for the integration of such literature into the EFL curriculum.