

# CONSUMING DIFFERENCE

## ETHNICITY AND DIVERSITY



**Dr. Steffen Wöll**

Seminar

American Studies Leipzig  
Winter Term 2026/27

Moodle



Monday 1–3 PM  
NSG 226

**AMERICAN  
STUDIES  
LEIPZIG**



**UNIVERSITÄT  
LEIPZIG**

# SYLLABUS

## Course Description

How do consumer cultures shape ideas about race and ethnicity? In her influential essay “Eating the Other,” bell hooks argues that within contemporary capitalism, cultural difference is often transformed into a commodity that promises novelty, authenticity, or transgression. Race, in this sense, becomes something that can be consumed.

Taking this insight as a starting point, the seminar examines how ethnic identities circulate through markets, media, and everyday life. We will explore the commodification of difference in areas such as food, tourism, fashion, music, advertising, and digital culture, while also considering less conventional sites of racial consumption, including horror fiction, true crime, video games, and representations of animals and bodies.

Combining approaches from American Studies, Cultural Studies, and Media Studies, the seminar covers a wide range of literary, visual, and pop-cultural sites. By tracing the connections between race and consumption, students will develop critical tools for understanding how consumer culture shapes perceptions of identity, difference, and belonging in the contemporary United States.

## Consuming Difference: Race and Consumer Culture in the United States

Ethnicity and Diversity in US  
Culture (04-001-1018)

Dr. Steffen Wöll

Seminar

Winter Term 2026/27

Monday 1–3 PM  
Neues Seminaregebäude  
Room 226

### MOODLE

[https://moodle2.uni-leipzig.de/  
course/view.php?id=61917](https://moodle2.uni-leipzig.de/course/view.php?id=61917)

### OFFICE HOUR

Friday 4–5 PM  
via [Zoom](#)  
No appointment needed

# Objectives

This seminar aims to

- Explore the intersections between consumerism, capitalism, race, and ethnicity
- Familiarize participants with analytical approaches and theoretical perspectives as part of the methodological plurality of American Studies
- Enable students to develop research interests and pursue them in academic debate and writing

# Requirements

To successfully complete this seminar, you must

- Attend class on a regular basis
- Prepare the readings for each session and bring the assigned texts to class
- Participate in discussions and group work
- Pass the Prüfungsvorleistung (PVL)
- Pass the final exam (Prüfungsleistung, i.e. term paper)

## Prüfungsvorleistung (PVL): Research Portfolio

To be eligible for the final exam, you must complete 2 PVL, both graded on a pass/fail basis. Each PVL may be repeated once if necessary. Please keep track of your completion rate.

### **PVL 1: Peer Reading Guide (individual task)**

- For 2 sessions, post a reaction (200-300 word) and 1-2 discussion questions in the respective forum
- PVL are due by Sunday 5 pm (the day before class)
- All students are expected to read these posts as warm-up

### **PVL 2: Weekly Media Respondents (groups of 2-3 students)**

- Sign up for one session on Moodle until October 18
- Connect with your co-presenters
- Select any media object (e.g. book, poem, movie, meme, soundbite, newspaper article, TikTok post, map, painting etc.) related to the week's topic
- Give a 5-10 minute (total time) in-class presentation discussing its relevance
- Creativity is encouraged!

# Prüfungsleistung (Project-based Exam)

The exam evaluates your academic progress throughout the semester. It is mandatory for passing not only this course but the E&D I module, except for Erasmus students. It consists of a Projektarbeit (project-based exam) with two components:

1. **Term paper** (written in this seminar) due **March 15, 2027**. See the guidelines below for details.
2. **Oral presentation**, delivered in the accompanying tutorial.

## Grading

Final grades are calculated from the weighted average of the term paper (double weight) and oral presentation (single weight). If the result falls between grades, the closest valid grade will be awarded.

For example: 
$$\frac{(2 \times 1.7) + (1 \times 2.0)}{3} = \frac{3.4 + 2.0}{3} = \frac{5.4}{3} = 1.8 = 1.7$$

## Erasmus

Erasmus students may earn either 2 ECTS for attending the seminar, or 4 ECTS for attendance and successful completion of both PVL and the term paper.

## Course Materials

All readings are available on Moodle. Films will be screened via Zoom at the times specified below. Check availability on streaming services if you plan to watch on your own schedule.

## Code of Conduct

This seminar enforces the American Studies Leipzig code of conduct (see <https://www.philol.uni-leipzig.de/en/institute-for-american-studies/studying/study-programs>).

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious form of academic misconduct in which an individual submits or presents the work of another person as their own. Scholarship often relies on examining and referring to thoughts and writings of others. However, doing so without proper acknowledgment is intellectually dishonest and a form of fraud. When you borrow three or more consecutive words, an original term, or a distinctive phrase, you must enclose the borrowed element in quotation marks to acknowledge your indebtedness. Any instance of plagiarism can have

serious professional and legal consequences, including expulsion from the course and subsequent annulment of an academic degree.

**Note:** ASL uses automated tools to detect plagiarized and generated text.

## Content Advisory

Academic practice in the humanities thrives in a culture of open debate among diverse perspectives. In this seminar, we will engage with a wide spectrum of concepts and ideas, some of which might be viewed as controversial.

## Schedule

|   |        |                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---|--------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Oct 12 | <b>Consumption / Difference / Otherness</b> |  Object of the Week: Bob Marley t-shirt<br><br>bell hooks. "Eating the Other"<br><br>Be prepared to introduce yourself and your research interests. Take a minute to think about what you expect from the seminar. |
| 2 | Oct 19 | <b>Race as Marketplace</b>                  |  Object of the Week: Aunt Jemima packaging<br><br>Pitcher, Ben. Consuming Race (Introduction & Chapter 2)                                                                                                        |
| 3 | Oct 26 | <b>Growing Consumers</b>                    |  Object of the Week: American Girl doll<br><br>Pitcher, Ben. Consuming Race (Chapter 6)<br><br>Bernstein, Harvey. Racial Innocence (Introduction)                                                                |
| 4 | Nov 2  | <b>Empire in Your Shopping Cart</b>         |  Object of the Week: Pears' ad<br><br>McClintock, Anne. "Soft-Soaping Empire"<br><br>Hall, Stuart. "The Spectacle of the Other"                                                                                  |

|   |        |                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---|--------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 | Nov 9  | <b>Eating Different</b>                      |  Object of the Week: Trader José<br><br>Pitcher, Ben. Consuming Race (Chapter 5)<br><br>Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. "Everything 'Cept Eat Us"                                                         |
| 6 | Nov 16 | <b>Fashion / Appropriation / Performance</b> |  Object of the Week: Air Jordan ad<br><br>Cherid, Maha Ikram. "Blackfishing, Cultural Appropriation, and the Commodification of Blackness"<br><br>Ford, Tanisha C. Liberated Threads (Chapter 4) |
| 7 | Nov 23 | <b>Paradise for Sale</b>                     |  Object of the Week: Tiki mug<br><br>Urry, John. The Tourist Gaze (Chapters 1 & 8)<br><br>MacCannell, Dean. The Tourist (Chapter 5)                                                              |
| 8 | Nov 30 | <b>Blackness™</b>                            |  Object of the Week: Nicki Minaj, "Queen" (2018)<br><br>Clay, Andreana. The Hip-Hop Generation Fights Back (Chapter 4)<br><br>bell hooks. "Selling Hot Pussy"                                  |
| 9 | Dec 7  | <b>P(I)ay to Win</b>                         |  Object of the Week: Washington Redskins banner<br><br>Carrington, Ben. Race, Sport and Politics (Chapter 3)<br><br>Leonard, David J. After Artest (Chapters 4 & 5)                            |

|    |        |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----|--------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Dec 14 | <b>The Happiest Place on Earth</b> |  Object of the Week: Disney park map<br><br>Giroux, Henry A. The Mouse that Roared (Introduction & Chapter 1)<br><br>Sandlin, Jennifer A. and Julie C. Garlen. "Disney's Pedagogies of Pleasure and the Eternal Recurrence of Whiteness"  |
| 11 | Jan 4  | <b>Scrolling Race</b>              |  Object of the Week: TikTok AI influencer<br><br>Brock, André Jr. Distributed Blackness - African American Cybercultures (Chapter 3)<br><br>Noble, Safiya Umoja. Algorithms of Oppression (Introduction & Chapter 1)                      |
| 12 | Jan 11 | <b>Shop Till You Drop</b>          |  Object of the Week: Mall of America<br><br>Romero, John. Dawn of the Dead [Screening: Jan 10, 8pm via <a href="#">Zoom</a> ]<br><br>Ahmad, Aalya. "Gray Is the New Black"<br><br>Shaviro, Steven. "Contagious Allegories: George Romero" |
| 13 | Jan 18 | <b>Murder for Sale</b>             |  Object of the Week: Netflix True Crime thumbnails<br><br>Liebler, Carol M. "Me(di)a Culpa?"<br><br>Murley, Jean. The Rise of True Crime (Chapter 4)                                                                                    |
| 14 | Jan 25 | <b>All Natural</b>                 |  Object of the Week: Whole Foods shopping bag<br><br>Pitcher, Ben. Consuming Race (Chapter 7)<br><br>Navarro, Marilisa C. "Radical Recipe"                                                                                              |

|                                                                  |       |                           |                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15                                                               | Feb 1 | <b>Everything Must Go</b> |  Object Workshop<br><br>Seminar conclusion |
| Term Paper due <b>March 15, 2027</b> (check your PVL completion) |       |                           |                                                                                                                             |

# TERM PAPER GUIDELINES

## Finding a Topic

Your paper builds on the analytical frameworks we developed throughout the semester. It should

- Extend class discussions by applying secondary literature (theory, criticism, etc.)
- Analyze one primary source (or, in justified cases, more)
- Relate your analysis to key seminar themes

You may (but are not required to) base your paper on a primary text discussed in class.

## Secondary Sources

Aim to include scholarship relevant to your topic, text, or approach. Use peer-reviewed academic sources to frame and support your argument. Recommended starting points are

- Leipzig University Library
- JSTOR, Project MUSE, ResearchGate, Google Scholar
- Bibliographies from seminar readings

## Writing Standards

Your paper should

- Present a clear thesis in the introduction
- Develop your argument paragraph by paragraph
- Analyze, not summarize

## Plagiarism

Always cite any idea, term, or phrasing that is not your own—whether quoted or paraphrased. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism and can have serious consequences.

## Formal Requirements

**Length:** 3,500 words incl. footnotes and bibliography (±10%)

**Format:** Times New Roman, Arial or similar; 12 pt; 1.5 spacing; 1-inch (2.54 cm) margins

**Citations:** Chicago Manual of Style 18 or MLA 9

**Structure:** Include an introduction, conclusion, and bibliography/works cited

**Thesis:** State your central argument clearly, preferably at the start or end of the introduction

**Submission:** Upload as single PDF with signed Plagiarism & AI Disclaimers

**Optional** (recommended):

- Use chapter headings to improve orientation
- Offer reader guidance that signals what is to come and outlines how your argument is structured
- If you have many (sub) chapters, consider including a table of contents

## Final Tips

Start early, stay curious, and do not hesitate to reach out for feedback.

Good luck on your research journey.

Submit on Moodle by **March 15, 2027**. Late submissions are only accepted under specific, documented circumstances.