



Nordamerikastudienprogramm
Institut für Anglistik, Amerikanistik und Keltologie



Lecture Series

"Current Issues in North American Studies and Cultural Studies"

Winter Term 2012-2013

Prof. Dr. Suleiman Osman

George Washington University

"The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York"

Tuesday • 18 December 2012 • 6:00-8:00 p.m.

Room A • Institut für Anglistik, Amerikanistik und Keltologie • Regina-Pacis-Weg 5

The gentrification of Brownstone Brooklyn has been one of the most striking developments in New York in recent decades. Once an impoverished tenement and industrial district known as South Brooklyn in the 1940s and 1950s, "Brownstone Brooklyn" today is a post-industrial landscape of hip bars, trendy shops, and expensive renovated townhouses. In this talk, Suleiman Osman will offer an early history of this unexpected transformation. Rather than pointing to real estate speculators or downtown developers, Osman locates the origins of gentrification in Brooklyn in the social and cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Gentrification began as a grassroots movement led by young and idealistic college graduates searching for "authenticity" in the center city. Influenced by writers like Jane Jacobs, this new romantic and postindustrial urban ideal celebrated historic buildings, industrial lofts, and traditional ethnic neighborhoods as an imagined authentic refuge from an increasingly technocratic society. By the 1980s, as newspapers parodied "yuppies," developers opened postmodern historically-themed luxury condos, and anti-gentrification activists marched through increasingly expensive neighborhoods, Brooklyn's new middle class began to question whether their search for authenticity had been a success or failure.

Suleiman Osman is Associate Professor of American Studies at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 2006. Osman specializes in U.S. urban history, the built environment, U.S. cultural and social history, and the study of race and ethnicity, with a particular focus on the way urban space both shapes and is produced by culture and politics. Osman's monograph *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York* (Oxford UP, 2011) received the New York Society Library's Hornblower Prize in 2012. His current project examines the urban politics and culture of the 1970s.