

DEATH AND DYING IN AMERICAN CULTURE

In recent years, popular TV series such as *CSI*, *Bones*, *Dexter*, and *Game of Thrones* have exposed viewers to high numbers of dead bodies per episode, yet in the news media, it remains largely taboo to depict the death and dying of Americans. From fallen soldiers to shooting victims, news media reduce the dead to symbolic representations in order to avoid dealing with the finality and omnipresence of death. However, in current scholarly discourse, books such as *Drop Dead Gorgeous: Representations of Corpses in American TV Shows* (2011) by Tina Weber, and *Death, American Style: A Cultural History of Dying in America* (2013) by Lawrence R. Samuel investigate death and dying from a sociological and cultural perspective. As American demographics shift toward an older population, social and political institutions are also increasingly forced to deal with death and dying. The prevalence of death and society's reluctance to confront it is a phenomenon that is fascinating and provides a particularly fertile subject for discussion.

With our **fourth annual American Studies Leipzig MA-level graduate student conference "Death and Dying in American Culture,"** we will explore diverse representations and conceptions of death as well as investigate social, cultural, and political perspectives on the topic. Although a number of academic disciplines have addressed various notions of death and dying, American studies provides a platform to approach this topic in an interdisciplinary manner. Due to this multifaceted approach, the conference will provide new insights into American culture by scrutinizing varied discourses on and conceptualizations of death and dying.

Potential research questions could include but are not limited to:

- How is death and dying dealt with in American society?
- What are the visual politics involved in representations of death in news media?
- How is the ambivalent relation to death—whether fascination or fear—represented in literature, music, fine art, or other forms of cultural expression?
- What does the commodification of death mean for American culture?
- How have cultural and social perceptions of death and dying changed over time?

Our conference invites **all interested MA-level students** to present their innovative work to an international audience. Please **submit your proposal (max. 300 words) for a 20-minute presentation** and include your name, current level of graduate study, affiliated university or current occupation, and e-mail address to asl-gradconference@uni-leipzig.de by **January 7, 2014**.

A limited number of travel grants may be available on a case-to-case basis.

For more information please refer to <http://www.death-and-dying.de> or contact us via e-mail.