

GUEST LECTURE

17.4.2012

18-20 Uhr, ES 131 (alt H 19)

– everybody welcome!!!!

Prof. em. Dr. Dr. Peter Freese (Paderborn)

“What, then, is the American, this new man?” (Crèvecoeur):

National Identity in a Country of Immigrants

In our globalized world, the concept of ‘national identity’ is increasingly difficult to define, and some even argue that it has become obsolete. I will deal with the question of what this concept has meant and still means in the U.S. as a country of immigrants, and since I have to gear my observations to what can be done within the advanced EFL-classroom, I will use not only verbal but also visual and audio texts of different types. I will survey the historical unfolding of the American identity concept by looking at major developments from Unconditional Assimilation through Anglo-Saxon Racialism to Multiculturalism and show that this concept is based on consent instead of descent, that it oscillates between the *unum* and the *plures*, the unifying power of a shared creed and the diversifying tendencies of different ethnicities, and that the question as to which and how many immigrants are admitted and how they are assimilated has been and still is of crucial importance. I will then offer two teaching units, one tracing major phases by means of central texts from Crèvecoeur and Zangwill to Strong and Grant, and the other dealing with a question that is central to foreign-language learning, namely, the decisive issue of whether a shared language is a prerequisite for a shared national identity.