

## **“Let's Make America Great Again”: A History of Nostalgia as a United States Identity Ideology in the 1980s**

This dissertation project seeks to analyze the discursive strategy of nostalgic rhetoric that impacted the political and cultural life in the United States during the Reagan presidency, and that is still reflected in contemporary political and cultural discourse. Donald Trump, who was elected president in 2016, used the slogan “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) during his election campaign, and subsequently made it the battle cry of his presidency. This phrase has been used before in American politics, most notably during Ronald Reagan’s first successful presidential run in 1980. The slogan suggests an America that used to be glorious but has lost its strength. It is then the mission of strong leaders and patriotic citizens to bring the country back to its days of glory. Injustices, national hardships and violence are concealed within this rhetoric, and/or are completely redefined within the splendor of this imagined past. The central argument of this project is that the nostalgic rhetoric is used in political and cultural discourse to shape and strengthen identity during times of social change and discontent.

A crucial aspect of nostalgia is the inherent emotionality, therefore the focus of the work lies on nostalgic rhetoric that is presented through visual media—a medium that is effective in initiating an emotional response, while simultaneously also having a manipulative effect on the audience. The methodological approach reflects the broad and productive scope of the field of nostalgia studies, and the history of the political alike. Therefore, theories from the history of emotion and the field of visual culture studies are just as important as discourse analytical approaches, making this work highly interdisciplinary. The source material is mainly compiled of televised news media, but printed news media is also taken into consideration as an object of comparison.

Over the recent years, nostalgia has become an important and widely discussed phenomenon, with an ever-expanding set of definitions and applications. This project’s focus on identity (and the appropriation of “identity politics”) and social discontent has strong contemporary relevance and adds an important perspective to the established scholarly work on the history of the United States, national identity, nostalgia studies, and the “Reagan years”.