

UTOPIA

Director: Peter Roloff
Genre: documentary
Duration: 90 min.
Format: HD

Synopsis

Revisiting a German State in America

The documentary "Utopia" follows the trail of a "German republic" in the USA, a bold and unique project in the history of German democracy and on the Western Frontier of the United States: Friedrich Muench and his friend Paul Follenius found the "Giessen Emigration Society". And 500 people leave together with them in spring of 1834. Where does their journey lead them?

Equal civil rights! Political participation! Freedom of speech, elections, education, and self-development! 500 people left their homeland together for these very ideals. It is the year 1834, they are subjects living under the suppressing German rulers, they are consumed with a desire for change – and are being led forth by the idea of a utopia. The creation of a model German democratic republic in America. Led by lawyer Paul Follenius and pastor Friedrich Muench, the "Giessen Emigration Society" crosses the Atlantic Ocean and risks a new start in the unknown "Land of the Free". By founding a state they hope to create upheaval and provide a role model for the overthrow of powers in all of Germany. Can it succeed? Where will their travels take them?

Like the Society from 1834, a reasearch team makes its way from Hesse to Bremen, via an emergency bivouac on the island of Harriersand, finishing in Missouri in the USA. The team is composed of filmmaker Peter Roloff, archivist Ludwig Brake from Giessen, Bremen-based author Rolf Schmidt, and historian Dorris Keeven-Franke from Missouri. They are united by the search for the causes, history, and effects of one of Germany's most unique political projects – an unknown chapter in the history of German democracy.

The team follows the life paths of Muench and Follenius. They come across a surprising multitude of original sites and scenes, like the farms of Friedrich Muench and Paul Follenius, heartrending documents in the archives, knowledgeable descendents, and passionate experts in the field – such as a hundred-year-old historian. It is here that we discover the driving forces behind Muench and Follenius and how the utopian project has continued in Missouri, albeit in a different form.

The film is a journey into the motives and the highs and lows of a bold vision in the fight for personal freedom and the freedom of others. And so naturally the question arises: "What about me?"

Production

year of production 2014
duration 90 min.

with Bob Brail, Ludwig Brake, Cindy Browne, Doris Eschbach, André Feldhaus, Ralph Gregory, Dorris Keeven-Franke, Will McHugh, Carol Muench, Matthias Nistal, Gerd Petermann, Penny Pitman, Lois Puchta, Chick Ruether, Thomas Schill, Rolf Schmidt, Gunter Schröder, among others

writer, director, photograper Peter Roloff
editor Manfred Hielscher
music André Feldhaus
sound mix Oliver Sroweleit
still photography Folker Winkelmann
location manager Germany Oliver Behnecke
location manager USA Dorris Keeven-Franke
2nd camera Manfred Hielscher, Monika Kiesewetter, Thomas Kutschker, Reinhard Lorenz
script consultant Henry Schneider
mixing studio Studio Nord Bremen
translations Babelfisch Translations
artwork tho Aspern promotion design
in collaboration with Traveling Summer Republic
producer Peter Roloff
funded by nordmedia - Film- und Mediengesellschaft Lower Saxony/Bremen
production maxim film

Distribution

Double DVD "Utopia" available in the US for \$ 24.95:

[Amazon](#)
[German-American Heritage Museum](#), Washington DC
[Missouri History Museum](#), St. Louis

Content:

1st DVD - 90 min. Utopia documentary

2nd DVD - 6 bonus videos:

Hesse – Securing of Evidence (12 min.)

Dutzow, Germany (16 min.) (German only)

Bremen – City of Emigrants (12 min.)

Investigating ancestry (18 min.)

VideoBook Ralph Gregory (55 min.)

Rare Book Room, Washington, MO (12 min.)

Festivals/Awards/TV

German premiere

Kinocenter Giessen

June 17, 2015 - 8:15 pm

World premiere

St. Louis International Film Festival

November 23, 2014

More info

Facebook: [facebook.com/UtopiaDocumentary](https://www.facebook.com/UtopiaDocumentary)

Download film poster [here](#).

The **traveling exhibition** "Utopia - Revisiting a German State in America" is on display in September/October 2014 in Washington DC and from November 2014 to April 2015 in St. Louis, Missouri.

The accompanying **book Utopia**, published by Edition Falkenberg, is available in the US at the [University of Chicago Press](http://www.uchicago.edu).

A free educational syllabus and information about exhibit and events are available here: www.utopia-exhibit.net
