American Studies Course Descriptions
FALL 2012

Revised: 10/26/12

Note: Check the GW Schedule of Classes website for class locations and the most up-to-date information at http://my.gwu.edu/mod/pws/

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

AMST 1000.10 – Civil Rights Movement
Tom Guglielmo
M, 3:30–6:00
The civil rights movement, among the most dramatic and important stories in all U.S. history, is little understood. Conventional wisdom tends to focus on larger-than-life leaders like Martin Luther King and made-for-television events like the March on Washington, but loses sight of the dynamism and significance of grassroots organizing. It recalls the epic battles against Jim Crow lunch counters in the South, but forgets those for equal access to good jobs and strong unions throughout the country. It looks primarily at African Americans, as it should, but often overlooks other activists of color and their own unique freedom struggles. For all these reasons, it makes sense to talk not of the civil rights movement in the singular, but many civil rights movements in the plural—movements that varied over time and place and involved a disparate mix of blacks—working class and middle class, Northern and Southern, urban and rural, radical and moderate, Christian and secular, women and men—as well as a similarly diverse group of Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and some whites. This course will chart the history of these multiple movements, focusing on their early origins and present-day formations, triumphs and failures, ironies and unexpected outcomes. Registration restricted to CCAS freshman.

AMST 1000.11 – Black Culture in the Nation’s Capital
Jim Miller
W, 3:30–6:00
This seminar will examine aspects of African American life and history in Washington D.C., from the Harlem Renaissance to the present through encounters with literature, film, music, and visual culture as well as visits to historic sites in the city. Registration restricted to CCAS freshman.

AMST 1000.12 – Representing Black Men
Calvin Warren
WF, 2:20–3:35
Black men are complicated, if not paradoxical, figures in American society. On the one hand, black men are hyper-visible in media/popular culture, as fetish objects of consumption and fantasy; on the other hand, black men are invisible as subjects—their political concerns (e.g. high mortality rates and joblessness) are often underrepresented, disregarded, or unpublicized. This course examines the historical and cultural representation of black men in American society. The following questions will orient the course: What social, cultural, and historical formations sustain the ‘paradox of representation’ (hyper-visibility/invisibility)? What strategies have black men used to challenge these formations? Have representations of high-profile figures like President Obama opened up new representational possibilities for black men or entrenched stereotypical representations? We will grapple with these questions using photography, film, literature, autobiography, and historical documents. Registration restricted to CCAS freshman.

AMST 1000.13 – Human Minds & Artificial Intelligence
Jamie Cohen-Cole
WF, 2:20–3:35
Where is the boundary between humans and robots? Is it that humans can bleed and robots can rust? Or is there something more important that gets to what is distinctive about humanity? Is it how we think, our intelligence, or our language? If so, then what happens when computers or robots speak and perform intelligent tasks? Focusing on questions such as these, this class looks at the history of computers, robots, and
artificial intelligence. In tracking this history, we will see how the line between humans and machines has been in constant motion as what we believe and imagine about machines has affected what we know, imagine, and believe about the human mind. We will examine these themes by reading about computers, robots, and artificial intelligence in history and through the visions of the future given in science fiction stories and movies from Frankenstein to AI and I, Robot. Topics covered in this course include Charles Babbage’s analytical engine, the Turing Machine, cyberspace, and the origins, development, and criticism of research in artificial intelligence.

AMST 1050.10 – American Fantasy
Ramzi Fawaz
TR, 8:00–9:15
The 20th century is often understood as the era in which scientific rationalism, reason, and technology triumphed over age-old superstitions and enchanted ways of thinking. Yet modern American culture is filled with wizards, faeries, time travel, superheroes, enchanted forests, and any number of fantasy worlds. This course offers an introduction to American Studies by asking what role fantasy has played in shaping American popular and political culture in the 20th century. Though long understood as juvenile entertainment, fantasy is arguably the most important element of American popular culture, offering the promise of boundless transformation, pleasure in the impossible, and utopian visions of a better world. Rather than a discreet genre, we will treat fantasy as a mode of communication or expression that runs through a variety of American popular forms, including high and commercial art, children’s literature, comics, Hollywood film, novels, and television; in turn, we will ask what kinds of pleasures and desires fantasy activates, how forms of enchantment transform ways of seeing the ordinary world, and why certain kinds of fantasy (including magic, metamorphoses, time travel, ghosts and hauntings, alternate realities, and superhuman ability) came to make sense to people at specific moments in the 20th century.

AMST 1100.10 – Politics and Film
Elisabeth Anker
This class addresses the relationship between politics and film by examining how American films interpret and challenge political power in America. We pair film analysis with readings in political theory to interrogate the operations of power in political life. Exploring films thematically, first we examine those that shape conventional interpretations of political power in America, including concepts of limited government, popular sovereignty, and liberal individualism. Next, we consider films that challenge these ideas by offering alternate conceptions of how power functions, while addressing questions of ideology, surveillance, domination, and biopolitics. The last section investigates particular genres—melodrama, the western, and film noir—that reshape and rearticulate these themes within American political culture. Throughout, we will focus on how to read the visual language of film and the written texts of political theory. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

AMST 2010.80 – Early American Cultural History
Teresa Murphy
MW, 2:20–3:10
This course starts with the argument that understanding culture is key to understanding American history. Culture can refer to art and literature—some of which we will explore in class. However, culture can also refer to popular forms of expression, including the way people act. With this broader perspective, we will study some of the major scholarship addressing the evolution of American culture—from the Colonial period through Reconstruction. For example, we will look at what scholars have to say about why minstrel shows were popular and about how Indian captivity narratives were used to justify the conquest of the West. To shape our analyses, we will examine old newspapers, read popular literature, and explore the museums here in Washington, DC—then develop our own opinions and arguments as we engage in small group discussions and complete class assignments. This is an upper division course, but it is geared toward freshman and sophomores who are looking for a challenge. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.
AMST 2320.80 – U.S. Media and Cultural History
Melani McAlister
TR, 11:10–12:00
This course will examine mass culture – film, radio, television, internet – and its role in US history from the turn of the 20th century to the present. Focusing on media production, consumption, and reception, this course will consider the historical contexts in which media emerged and developed. The cultural texts range from silent films to post-WWII sitcoms and contemporary new media. Students will learn to consider media histories in light of theoretical debates about ideology, media effects, national identity, ethnic and racial identity, gender roles, and imperialism. In addition to other course requirements, student work includes a research paper in which students analyze a media artifact in its historical and cultural context. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

AMST 2350.80 – U.S. Religion and Politics
Kip Kosek
TR, 11:10–12:00
This course explores the history of religion in American politics and public life. Main themes include: religious and secular visions of the nation; religion’s role in promoting or preventing bigotry, conflict, and violence; the separation of church and state; religious factors in racial and gender politics; the use of religious resources in reform movements; and the relationship of religion and democracy. Likely subjects of study include: the Constitution, the Civil War, immigration, World War II, the civil rights movement, the New Christian Right, and American Islam. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

AMST 2490.10 – Interracial America
Jennifer Nash
MW, 9:35–10:25
In 2000, the novelist Danzy Senna declared the dawning of the "mulatto millennium." She wrote "Strange to wake up and realize you’re in style. Hybridity is in! America loves us in all of our half-caste glory." That same year, literary scholar Werner Sollors posed the question “What is American about American culture?” His answer: a persistent “attempt to prohibit, contain, or deny the presence of black-white interracial sexual relations, interracial marriage, interracial desert, and other family relations across the powerful black-white divide.” How can we reconcile Senna and Sollors? How is it that America is both invested in celebrating racial mixedness and preoccupied with regulating interracial intimacies? This course will introduce students to the vibrant, interdisciplinary field of interracialism studies. Over the course of the semester, we will explore: historical and contemporary debates about intimacies across racial borders (including debates about interracial love, marriage, and sex; multiracial families; and transracial adoption), legal regulations of interracial intimacy, the emergence of a mixed race movement in America, the calls for a "post-racial" America, media representations of mixed-race bodies, and "black/brown" political coalitions. The course will include readings by: Rebecca Walker, Randall Kennedy, and Vijay Prashad.

AMST 2520.80 – American Architecture 1600-1860
Richard Longstreth
MW, 9:35–10:50
This course examines selected aspects of the built environment in the United States from the first period of European settlement to the eve of the Civil War. Stylistic properties, functions, common patterns of design, technological developments, and urbanistic patterns are introduced as vehicles for interpreting the historical significance of this legacy of both exceptional and representative examples. Buildings are analyzed both as artifacts and as signifiers of broader social, cultural, and economic tendencies. Other topics introduced include the persistence and mixing of cultural traditions, the role of the designer, the influence of region, and architecture as a component of landscape. Among the facets of the built environment that are examined are the multi-faceted nature of colonial building and settlement patterns; the emergence of national expression; the rise of city building and of a commercial core; the growing specificity of building types for commercial, governmental, institutional, and religious functions; the enduring importance of the single-family house; the multi-faceted nature of eclecticism; evolving views of nature and landscape design; and the impact of technology. Detailed examination is made of the contribution made by many celebrated figures in design, including Alexander Jackson Davis, Andrew Jackson Downing, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Robert Mills, Frederick Law Olmsted, William Strickland, and Richard Upjohn. At the same time, attention is
given to broad tendencies in design and their effect upon rural and urban landscapes. The impact of peoples from Africa and the Caribbean, the British Isles, France, German states, the Netherlands, and Spain is examined during both the colonial and post-colonial periods. Lectures are profusely illustrated.

**AMST 2530.80 – Folk Arts in America**  
John Vlach  
MW, 3:45–5:00  
This course will present an overview of folk art traditions within the United States. Examples will include works produced by a variety of ethnic and regional groups including Native Americans, African Americans, and Euro-Americans. Examples of blacksmithing, pottery, quilting, woodcarving, ceramics, and other genres will be surveyed. Lectures will be organized by artistic media. Several examples within each medium will be discussed to illustrate significant aspects of historical development, cultural variation, technical expertise, and/or creative innovation. Lectures will all be illustrated with slides (some films may be shown) and we may also have some visiting specialists give presentations.

**AMST 2730W.80 – World War II in History and Memory**  
Tom Guglielmo  
TR, 9:35–10:25  
This course will examine the history of Americans' World War II experiences and how those experiences have been studied, understood, and “remembered”—officially, culturally, and personally. It focuses on six overlapping topics—soldiers, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Holocaust, women, Japanese American internment, and race relations. **This course will satisfy a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.**

**AMST 2750W.80 – Latinos in the United States**  
Elaine Pena  
TR, 12:45–1:35  
The U.S. Census Bureau projects that Latinos will make up the majority in the United States by 2050. But who are Latinos? What does that term mean now and how has it changed over time? How does the term Latino affect the communities it seeks to represent? Throughout the semester, we will critically analyze the evolution of the term and its impact on discussions of race, identity, and citizenship expectations in the United States. We will engage ethnographic and historical analyses, literary works, and films that explore Latino community formation in geographic regions across the nation. One of the goals of this course is to not only identify how historical, political, and economic changes have shaped the term Latino in the United States but also connect those processes to shifts in immigration policy. **This course will satisfy a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.**

**AMST 3352W.80 – Women in the United States**  
Teresa Murphy  
MW, 11:10–12:00  
This course will examine the history of women in the United States from pre-Columbian settlement until Reconstruction. We will pay particular attention to the ways in which gender has been an important component in the construction of power relationships; the ways in which issues of race and class have affected the relationships among women; and the ways in which ideas about gender have evolved during the past several centuries. **This course will satisfy a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.**

**AMST 3900.10 – Critiquing Culture**  
Calvin Warren  
WF, 11:10–12:25  
This seminar introduces students to major methods for understanding and interpreting cultural materials. We will explore how and why culture—particularly mass culture such as film, television, photography, music, fashion, and advertising—plays such a significant role in our lives. At various point in the semester, we will examine 1) the ways that we experience culture and ground our identities in it; 2) the ideological messages and stereotypes that circulate in cultural products; 3) the institutional, corporate and individual production of cultural products and spaces; and 4) the ways that different audiences interpret the culture they consume. This
course is reading intensive and discussion-oriented. **Registration restricted to American Studies majors; minors admitted with permission of instructor.**

**AMST 3901.10 – Examining America**

Elaine Pena  
TR, 3:45–5:00  
This course invites students to examine America using transnationalism as an optic. A wide array of experiences and itineraries, exchanges and networks, social movements and communities are today referred to as transnational. The United States is deeply invested in maintaining those long-standing strategies of social reproduction and economic advancement. But how does that affect American identity? For example, does the transnational flow of capital, people, ideas, and cultural values impact understandings of American exceptionalism, influence constructions of the nation, or determine who can be American? We will consider these questions using a variety of interpretive tools—including social histories, cultural studies, literary texts, and ethnographic analyses. We will also place these discussions within the broader context of American Studies to understand when these concerns emerged in the field and how scholarly debates have changed over time. **Registration restricted to American Studies majors; minors admitted with permission of instructor.**

**AMST 3950W.10 – Madness and Psychiatry in America**

Kathleen Brian  
TR, 12:45–2:00  
This course will examine the ways in which Americans have understood and responded to mental difference throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will begin with the “discovery” of the insane asylum in the 1830s and progress forward to the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As we move through this history, we will ask three primary questions: How have Americans perceived and responded to mental difference in their midst? How has the state been complicit in these responses? How have those deemed mentally different experienced these responses and what strategies have they developed to counter them? The class will be organized around six distinct periods: the advent of asylum medicine and the professionalization of American psychiatry; the patient protest movement of the mid-nineteenth century; the eugenics movement; the role of the two world wars in psychiatric learning; the creation of the DSM and the rise of psychopharmacology; and the anti-psychiatry movement. The course satisfies a WID requirement and is designed to advance students’ critical writing skills, specifically their ability to develop original arguments and analyze a range of cultural materials, including medical case files, patient narratives, and documentary film.

**AMST 3950.80 – Jews in American Popular Culture**

Lauren Strauss  
TR, 9:35–10:50  
The large number of Jews in America’s theater, movie, music, comic, and television industries has attracted a great deal of notice – and often humor – from observers and from Jews themselves. But Jewish involvement in the development of American popular culture is about more than casual religious or ethnic identification. Studying this phenomenon requires us to investigate the depth of America’s multi-ethnic character, as well as swiftly changing definitions of “Jewishness.” In this course, we explore questions of Jewish identity and the influence of politics, gender, and sexuality on the production of culture. From earlier twentieth century entertainers like Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and Sophie Tucker to later legends (both real-life and fictitious) such as Stephen Sondheim, Barbra Streisand, and Superman, and on to contemporary figures like Jon Stewart, Sara Silverman, and Jerry Seinfeld, the study of Jews in American popular culture invites us to reflect on what it means to live as a Jew in an open society, and as a minority in modern America.

**AMST 3950.81 – History of Jewish People in America**

Lauren Strauss  
TR, 12:45–2:00  
From its beginnings more than 350 years ago to the present day, the American Jewish community has challenged and redefined notions of citizenship and ethnic identity. American Jews have often been at the forefront of movements for social change, whether confronting anti-Semitism, rallying American workers in the labor movement, or fighting on behalf of women’s rights and gay rights. At the same time, Jews have often taken the lead in establishing institutions of middle class life in the U.S. Drawing on a variety of sources – personal memoirs, academic articles, government documents, photographs, cookbooks, poems, songs, and
movies – we uncover the story of one of the most complex and vibrant communities in both Jewish and American history. Beginning in the Colonial era, we travel through the Civil War period and the late nineteenth century, to the upheavals of the twentieth century and the challenges of contemporary America.

AMST 4500W.10 – Culture of Consumption
Teresa Murphy
T, 3:30–6:00
This is a senior research seminar in which students will produce papers around topics that in one way or another investigate the culture of consumption in the United States. Students might approach this topic by asking questions concerning the growth of capitalism, the relationship of consumerism to democracy or nationalism, the way in which consumerism affects transnational relationships, the way in which social identities (racial, ethnic, gendered) are formed through consumption, as well as the way in which religion is experienced through consumer activities. Students might draw upon archival materials as well as sources from material culture or other forms of media from print to internet. We will read key theoretical pieces as well as exemplary articles on this issue. Students will then engage in individual research projects of their choosing that in some way address important scholarly issues related to this topic. Students may focus their research on any time period and use any methodology that is deemed appropriate, but all students will be expected to engage in primary source research. We will focus on individual research and writing, as well as on reading and commenting on each other’s work. Students will learn how to produce a proposal, a bibliographic essay, and a final research paper. This course will satisfy a WID requirement. Registration restricted to American Studies majors only.

AMST 4500W.11 – Citizenship and the Politics of Identity
Elisabeth Anker
R, 12:45–3:15
This research seminar explores the cultural experience and practices of citizenship in America. Students will undertake original, independent research on this topic using a combination of historical research and cultural criticism. Possible projects might include the examination of different practices or norms of citizenship among different racial, sexual, gendered, religious, immigrant or class groups; modes of political activism or experiences of political exclusion; the performance of citizenship in particular cultural contexts; and the social construction of exemplary or disobedient citizens. Importantly, each project will need to define and defend what, exactly, citizenship means in the social, political and historical context they examine. Students will spend the semester writing a substantial research paper based on primary source materials and cultural analysis, and all papers must be grounded in relevant, existing scholarship. This course will satisfy a WID requirement. Registration restricted to American Studies majors only.
AMST 6100.10 – Scope and Methods: American Studies  
Kip Kosek  
T, 3:30–5:30  
This course is an intensive introduction to the history, debates, and methodologies that are central to the field of American Studies. Students will analyze key texts, explore ways to redefine the canon of American Studies scholarship, and begin to formulate ideas for future research. *This course is restricted to graduate students in American Studies.*

AMST 6190.10 – Critical Race Theory  
Jennifer Nash  
M, 12:00–2:00  
This graduate seminar offers a rigorous introduction to the field of critical race theory, a theoretical and political project that emerged "from the ground." Drawing on critical legal studies and radical feminism, critical race practitioners sought to radically re-make law, to re-imagine justice, and to make radical critique a practice with material consequences. We will begin by reading a set of texts that interrogate the very vocabulary of law: rights, remedy, objectivity, neutrality, and intentionality. We will then study the host of fields that emerged - both within and outside of the legal academy - extending, and sometimes parting company with critical race theory, including LatCrit (Latino/a Crit), QueerCrit, and Critical Race Feminism, and examine critiques of critical race theory emerging from the Left and the Right. Finally, we will ask about how critical race theory is practiced now, particularly in a moment when critical theory is so skeptical of identity politics. Readings will include: Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, Kimberle Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Randall Kennedy, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Mari Matsuda, and David Eng. *Registration restricted to graduate students.*

AMST 6190.11 – Cultural Studies and Popular Culture, 1970-Present  
Melani McAlister  
R, 3:30–6:00  

AMST 6190.12 – Preservation and Sustainability  
Richard Wagner  
R, 6:10–8:00  
The contributions of historic preservation brings to the drive for sustainability are substantial, but are all too often unrecognized by public officials, practitioners, or framers of policy. At the same time, many preservationists have a naïve view of sustainability at best. The need for greater understanding and exchange is pressing given the potential benefits to both spheres. This course will dispel a number of myths as well as provide new perspectives on how sustainability’s goals can be advanced. It is designed for students with an interest in sustainability and its effects on the built environment who wish to explore an important and too often neglected sphere in depth. The course will provide an understanding of the relationships between historic
preservation and the cultural, social and economic dimensions of sustainability with specific reference to current and future policies affect both sustainability and preservation. The content consists of analyzing an array of pertinent literature through readings and in class discussions. Each student will be expected to develop a white paper on a topic related to historic preservation and sustainability during the semester.

**AMST 6190.80 – Science, Cultural Politics and the Long 20th Century**
Jamie Cohen-Cole  
W, 12:00–2:00  
This graduate seminar provides an introduction to the history of science in America from the late nineteenth century to the present. A premise of the class is that science, culture, and politics mutually constitute one another. We will examine the role of the sciences in shaping the cultural, political, and social life of the last century. Conversely, the class will also study how the sciences have been influenced by their historical milieu. Readings will include methodologies for investigating the science/culture interface and historical topics, including Cold War culture, the environmental movement, computer and internet culture, technocracy, industrial and post industrial capitalism, human nature, and human difference. *Registration restricted to graduate students.*

**AMST 6431.80 – Gender, Sexuality, and American Culture II**  
Chad Heap  
F, 1:00–3:00  
This graduate seminar explores the usefulness of gender and sexuality as categories of analysis in American Studies. Focusing on the post-Reconstruction era, we will read broadly across the field of sexuality and gender studies in U.S. history, ethnography, cultural and visual studies, and critical theory. We will examine the roles that gender and sexuality played in shaping late-nineteenth-, twentieth-, and early-twenty-first-century American culture; the extent to which modernity and postmodernity gave rise to new categories of sexual and gender identity and experience; and the historically shifting meanings and cultural representations that have marked sexual difference. We will pay particular attention to the intersection of gender and sexuality with race, class, religion, citizenship, age, and the body; the spatial organization of gender and sexuality in relation to the city, the border, the state, empire, and globalization; and the role that cultural discourses and products—including film, photography, news media, literature, medicine, science, and the law—play in shaping the popular understanding of sexuality and gender and vice versa. *Registration restricted to graduate students.*

**AMST 6495.80 – Historic Preservation: Principles and Methods**  
Richard Longstreth  
MW, 4:10–6:00  
This course addresses the scope and purpose of the preservation movement in the U.S., focusing on developments since the 1960s. Topics investigated include the development of ideas and approaches to preservation at home and abroad since the late 18th century; the legal framework developed at the national, state, and local levels to foster preservation; the nature of an dynamics between public- and private-sector preservation organizations; and key facets of the research process essential to determine significance and set priorities to protecting historic properties. Throughout the course, both pragmatic and conceptual aspects are explored, as are the implications of preservation practice on broader realms, ranging from our attitudes toward the past to the tangible benefits for a community or business. Preservation must be a practical line of work imbued with political, technical, and economic expertise, but its ultimate worth is as a form of cultural expression. Classroom lectures and discussions are supplemented by visits from a number of prominent figures in the field—both nationally and locally—who afford behind-the-scenes insight current initiatives and challenges. *Registration restricted to graduate students.*

**AMST 6561.80 – Seminar: American Folklife**  
John Vlach  
W, 6:10–8:00  
This course will present the materials of American folk culture concentrating particularly on folk architecture, folk crafts, and folk art. The major organizing themes of the course are regionalism and local cultural values. During the first half of the course we will assess the entire nation in terms of architectural expression. Then we will focus on the topical insights that can be gained by the analysis of objects in their social contexts. Course requirements include assigned readings and a major term paper. *Registration restricted to graduate students.*
AMST 6709.80 – Interpretation in the Historic House Museum
Carol Stapp
T, 11:10–1:00
Enjoy first-hand encounters with an astounding array of museums through five class trips (including Frank Lloyd Wright’s Pope-Leighey House and Woodlawn Plantation; the Woodrow Wilson House; George Washington’s Mount Vernon; Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens; and President Lincoln’s Cottage). You’ll meet knowledgeable practitioners, who’ll give you a behind-the-scenes perspective on the challenges of interpretation—from living history to virtual visits—in America’s home-grown museum type. A short report focused on a National Park Service site (Arlington House or the Clara Barton National Historic Site) provides the groundwork for a field project in conjunction with the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site. The field projects are presented to FDNHS staff members, who join us for a poster session at the end of the course. Registration restricted to graduate students. This class meets off-campus for at least six sessions. Please plan for sufficient travel time before and after class.

AMST 6710.10 – American Material Culture
Katherine Ott
W, 1:30–3:30
This class is an introduction to the major theories, issues, and diverse viewpoints and practices in the field of material culture. Material culture refers to the objects and artifacts that populate the tactile and visual environment. Material culture is a form of evidence poorly understood and often dismissed, yet it is the primary component of the sensory world—it is through objects and images that people learn about and integrate themselves into the human community. Material culture carries and creates meaning. Some artifacts, such as the refrigerator, the spinning wheel, and the contraceptive pill, initiate new systems and support cultural transitions. Other objects, such as a wedding ring or a judge’s gavel, convey complex symbolic meanings. Still others, such as photographs and clothing, create personal identity. We will study the range of these relationships with material things. Registration restricted to graduate students. The class is taught by a Smithsonian history curator and meets off-campus; contact Professor Ott at ottk@si.edu for location details.

AMST 6730.10 – American Cool
Frank Goodyear
M, 6:10–8:00
When African-American jazz musicians named the state of mind known as "being cool" in the early 1940s, they referred to an ideal, balanced state of mind, a relaxed intensity. A "cool" jazz musician wore a blank facial expression—a mask—that projected rebellion against the status quo, an aloof indifference towards authority, a dedication to one's art form, and an insisted upon self-expression. These same ideals were appropriated by the white American counterculture under the terms "hip" and "cool"—first, in the 1950s, among the Beat Generation writers through jazz, slang, and bohemian life, and later, in the 1960s, through social protest and the hedonism of sex, drugs, and rock n' roll. By the 1970s, corporations began to appropriate cool, creating a "hip consumer" aesthetic that suggested anybody could be cool through the right style and material goods. Today some wonder whether "cool" is dead or, in light of so many distinct stylistic trends, whether "everything is cool." This course explores the origins and evolution of this cultural phenomenon, with an emphasis on the thirty-year period following World War Two. The practice and meaning of "being cool" has not remained static over time, and this graduate seminar will investigate chronologically the nineteenth and early twentieth-century roots of this state of mind, its codification in the 1940s, and its continuing evolution to the present-day. The class also argues that there is a distinct connection between the concept of "being cool" and the visual mediums of photography and film. The unique ability of photography and film to capture performance and the dominance of these mediums at mid-century made them the lens through which "cool" was understood. Registration restricted to graduate students.