American Studies Course Descriptions
FALL 2015

Revised: 7/14/15

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 – Back to the Land
Kip Kosek
WF, 11:10-12:25 CRN: 63848
Can we go back to the land? Should we? This Dean’s Seminar explores the history and ethics of Americans’ persistent efforts to find a closer connection to the natural world. Our subjects of inquiry include: the rise of urban farming in Washington and other major U.S. cities; the ways that business and government shape our food choices; the spiritual and moral values that Americans have assigned to wilderness; the racial and gender politics of getting back to nature; the significance of parks, cemeteries, and other “middle landscapes;” and differing visions of sustainable living. The course’s approach is interdisciplinary, drawing on history, literature, memoir, film, and other sources to discover the connections between nature, culture, and politics. ** This course requires occasional local field trips that will take place outside of class. Registration restricted to CCAS freshman. Department approval required to register.

AMST 1000.10 – Borders and Boundaries
Elaine Peña
TR, 9:35-10:50 CRN: 65515
International borders affect you every day. In the United States and elsewhere, they play a role in determining whether you are a birthright citizen or an unauthorized migrant. They showcase a nation’s ability or inability to guarantee your wellbeing. They factor into comprehensive immigration reform and national security debates that reinforce party lines and determine elections. Much of the food and many of the electronic items that we consume and use on a daily basis cross them en route to our supermarkets and shopping malls. Those who live in close proximity to an international border often deal with a particular set of issues. Living in an either/or environment can impel border residents to strategically recognize or deny cultural forms—to be hyper patriotic, for example, or to speak one language at home and another in school. This seminar will draw from the work of anthropologists, political scientists, historians, journalists, and documentary filmmakers to shine light on those processes. It will use the U.S.-Mexico border as its point of reference but it will also draw our attention to places like Ceuta and Melilla in Northern Africa and the Peten region that links Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize. Registration restricted to CCAS freshman. Department approval required to register.

AMST 1050.10 – Gender, Sexuality and Citizenship
Chad Heap
TR, 2:20-3:35 CRN: 67354
This new undergraduate lecture and discussion course prompts students to think about the ways that gender and sexuality have shaped American citizenship since WWII. Possible topics to be examined include the state’s efforts to regulate marriage, reproduction, obscenity, and childhood sexualities; the emergence of the right to privacy and the privatization of sexuality; the role that gender and sexuality have played in determining who can work for the government,
serve in the military, or immigrate to the United States; the development of women’s and LGBT social movements and identity politics; the ways that cultural representations of women and sexual and gender minorities have shaped Americans’ understanding of good (and bad) citizens; and the effects of violence on the full participation of women and members of the LGBT community in American politics and culture, including college campus life.

AMST 1050.11 – History of Americans in Paris
Craig Allen
M, 11:10-1:00 CRN: 67772
“Ahh, Paree!” Hemmingway, Mary Cassatt, Richard Wright, Gertrude Stein, James Baldwin and Josephine Baker. The mere mention of Paris and these iconic American writers and artists evokes the romantic history (and some mythology) of the American in Paris. This course will use an interdisciplinary approach to examine the visual, musical and textual materials related to Americans in Paris. We explore how the urban spaces and places of Paris acted as crucibles for many modern American cultural, artistic and intellectual movements. We trace the rich history of Americans in Paris through an examination of the protagonists, works and seminal events of five periods: the pre- and early-American period (1774 – 1860; Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson), American Impressionism (1844 – 1888; Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, Henry Whistler), the celebrated Jazz Age and Lost Generation (1917 – 1938; Henry Miller, Josephine Baker, Hemmingway, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald); and the Post World War II & Beat Generation (Wright, Baldwin, Chester Himes and Allen Ginsburg). We will also avail ourselves of the theoretical tools with which to parse the myth from the reality of the history of Americans in Paris. In the end, we shall arrive at a clearer sense of the extent to which this history is central to our understanding of American national cultural identity. Registration restricted to CCAS freshmen.

AMST 1100.10 – Politics and Film
Elizabeth Anker
T, 11:10-12:25 CRN: 66780
T, 7:10-9:40 CRN: 66780
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 1200.10 – The Sixties in America
Suleiman Osman
WF, 2:20-3:10 CRN: 64887
This course will examine American society, culture, and politics during the dynamic and contentious decade of the 1960s. Students will examine topics such as the civil rights movement, the student movement, the Vietnam War and anti-war movement, black power, the counterculture, feminism, the environmental movement, and the rise of the New Right. Students will also examine how the memory of the 1960s continues to shape debates about political activism, foreign policy, and cultural consumption today. Students must also register for a
AMST 2010.80 – Early American Cultural History
Scott Larson
WF, 9:35-10:25 CRN: 63646
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 2071.80 – Introduction to the Arts in America
David Bjelajac
MW, 3:45-5:00 CRN: 67784
This is a lecture survey of American art from the colonial period to the postmodern present. Primarily focused upon painting, the course also covers sculpture, architecture, printmaking and photography within the broader visual and material culture of United States history. Art works are analyzed in relation to issues of religion, nationalism, ethnicity, race, class and gender. Students will acquire a basic knowledge of major developments in the history of American art and its relationship to other aspects of American visual and material culture. Students will read scholarly texts, art criticism and primary source documents to develop fundamental art historical techniques for visually analyzing artworks and for interpreting their compositional, narrative, formal, expressive properties in relation to political, cultural and socio-economic history. Students will develop writing skills for communicating critical ideas and the ways in which the visual arts historically have produced varied critical/interpretive responses and meanings from the colonial past to the present day.

AMST 2520.80 – American Architecture 1600-1860
Richard Longstreth
MW, 9:35–10:50 CRN: 63286
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 2730W.85 – World War II in History & Memory
Tom Guglielmo
MW, 11:10-12:00 CRN: 67623
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 Peña
TR, 12:45-1:35 CRN: 67251
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? Using a hemispheric approach, 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 debates and security initiatives. This course fulfills critical thinking and cross-cultural perspective learning goals. Same as Anth 2750. This course will satisfy a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

AMST 3900.10 – Critiquing Culture
Calvin Warren
TR, 12:45-14:00 CRN: 64784
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 3950.10 – U.S. Popular Music Cultures
This interdisciplinary course uses popular music—from ragtime to swing to soul to punk to salsa to rock to hip hop—as a lens for thinking critically about identity, culture, and history in the 20th and 21st century United States. It is not a historical survey of U.S. popular music or a course in popular music appreciation, but rather a course that teaches students various methodologies for thinking critically about popular music as an important form of cultural expression. We will examine popular music from the viewpoint of musicians (and other producers), the music industry (labels, streaming services, etc.), and music’s publics (audiences, fans) and ask questions about the “sonic Americas” articulated through popular music. Students will have chances to think about questions of hearing/listening, taste, genre, commodification, affect, audience, authenticity, fandom, the popular/popularity, space/soundscape, and identity. Requirements will include weekly short papers. The culminating project of the course is a “Critical Karaoke,” which involves an oral presentation set to a favorite song.

AMST 3950.11 – Violence in American Culture
Calvin Warren
TR, 3:55-4:45 CRN: 86578
Why is our culture obsessed with serial killers, horror films, street fights, YouTube clips of brutality, and homicidal video games? What does violence provide for our culture? Is it possible to live without it? This course will provide an overview of contemporary theoretical approaches to violence and American culture. In particular, we will interrogate the relationship between violence and identity, subjection and Ethics, knowledge and violence, and pleasure and terror. The course will consider the theoretical difficulties of studying violence: how do we isolate it as a conceptual object? Is there anything outside of violence, or is the world itself violence? We will examine concepts such as terror, “slow death,” horror, pain, terror, torture, necro-politics, and systemic forms of violence such as slavery, genocide, colonialism, and imprisonment. In particular, we will use theoretical frameworks to analyze instances of violence in American Culture and “violent products” that bring tremendous pleasure. Readings will include theoretical texts by Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Zizek, Saidiya Hartman, Lauren Berlant, Elaine Scarry, Frank Wilderson, Adriana Cavarero, Achille Mbembe, among others.

AMST 3950.12 – Symbols and Myths in US Visual Culture
David Bjelajac
T, 12:30-3:00 CRN: 66978
Within a global framework, this seminar explores the historical origins and varied political, cultural meanings of revolutionary symbols and myths from the American and French Revolutions of the late eighteenth century to the anti-Vietnam War, Black Power, Feminist and Gay Rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. American artists’ identification with the American revolutionary tradition will be explored in relation to socialist, communist internationalism, New Deal liberalism, and conservative adaptation of revolutionary symbolism as expressed currently in Tea Party Republicanism. The seminar will situate the fine arts within a broader visual, material culture, comprising a variety of objects and artifacts drawn from the mass media, popular entertainments and social, political organizations.
Crisis! Scandal! Controversy! This course explores a series of turning points in American Jewish history that prompted American Jewry to take stock of its place in the United States. Some of those moments had to do with anti-Jewish prejudice, others with economics and still others with matters of faith. Taken together, they challenged the Jewish community to define itself and its relationship with America.

**AMST 4500W.10 – Politics and Feelings**  
Elizabeth Anker  
M, 12:45-3:15 CRN: 62923  
This is an advanced research seminar for American Studies majors with a thematic focus on the relationship between politics, citizenship, and felt experience. Students will undertake original, independent research on this topic using a combination of historical research, political analysis, and cultural criticism. Students will spend the semester writing a substantial research paper based on primary source materials and critical analysis, and all papers must be grounded in relevant, existing scholarship. Possible projects might include the examination of sentiment in political films or novels; the ways that emotions like joy, envy, or rage infuse particular political events; how citizenship can take shape as a “feeling” of inclusion; how specific feelings like sorrow or anger are racialized and gendered; the study of the War on Terror as a political project defined by an emotion; how feelings motivate political action in various social movements and different historical contexts; and many others. *This course will satisfy a WID requirement.*  
Registration restricted to American Studies seniors only.

**AMST 4702W.80 – Race, Medicine, and Public Health**  
Vanessa Gamble  
MW, 12:45-2:00 CRN: 67239  
This course focuses on the role of race and racism in the development of American medicine and public health by examining the experiences of African Americans from slavery to today. It will emphasize the importance of understanding the historical roots of contemporary policy dilemmas such as racial and ethnic disparities in health and health care. The course will challenge students to synthesize materials from several disciplines to gain a broad understanding of the relationship between race, medicine, and public health in the United States. Among the questions that will be addressed are: How have race and racism influenced, and continue to influence, American medicine and public health? What is race? How have concepts of race evolved? What are racial and ethnic disparities in health and health care? What is the history of these disparities? What factors have contributed to these disparities? How have African Americans, the medical and public health professions, and governmental agencies addressed disparities in health and health care? What have been the experiences of African Americans as patients and health care providers? *This course will satisfy a WID requirement.*
AMST 6100.10 – Scope and Methods: American Studies
Suleiman Osman
R, 2:10-4:00 CRN: 62924
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 – Civil Rights Movements
Tom Guglielmo
T, 1:10-3:00 CRN: 66982
This graduate seminar will offer a high-level introduction to the scholarly literature on civil rights struggles in the United States. Focusing on some of the biggest questions that have animated the field over time, the course will construe these struggles broadly to include a disparate mix of African Americans—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, LGBT people, and disabled people. The course will also chart the history—and occasional intersections—of these multiple movements, focusing on their early origins and present-day formations, triumphs and failures, ironies and unexpected outcomes. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6190.11 – Progress and its Critics
Kip Kosek
W, 2:10-4:00 CRN: 66980
“How does it happen,” the historian Christopher Lasch once asked, “that serious people continue to believe in progress?” This graduate seminar investigates various conceptions and critiques of progress — whether social, cultural, economic, racial, sexual, or moral — in modern American history, while also exploring genealogies of progressive politics. Students will read and analyze key texts in American social thought from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century. Possible authors include Wendell Berry, Ignatius Donnelly, Betty Friedan, bell hooks, Martin Luther King, Jr., C. Wright Mills, Richard Rodriguez, and Francis Schaeffer. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6190.12 – Critical Race Theory
Jennifer Nash
M, 11:10-1:00 CRN: 66981
This graduate seminar offers a rigorous introduction to the field of critical race theory. Our exploration begins with critical race theory’s engagement with law’s primary analytics: rights, remedy, evidence, harm, violence, discrimination, injury, objectivity, neutrality, and intent. We will examine the host of ways that critical race theorists sought to radically re-make these concepts, re-imagine justice, and transform critique into a practice with material consequences. We will then turn our attention to contemporary scholarship that makes use of critical race theory’s methods, approaches, analytics, and political investments in an attempt to understand the persistence of racism. Readings include work by: Patricia J. Williams, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, Robin Bernstein, Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, Lisa Marie Cacho, and Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6190.13 – American Culture Since 1890
Chad Heap  
T, 5:10-7:00 CRN: 65887  
This graduate readings seminar introduces students to a selection of recent monographs focused on the cultural history of the U.S. since 1890. Beginning with the rise of modernity and mass consumption and continuing through the cultural transformations associated with postmodernity and globalization, the course will explore topics such as the development of visual and audio culture; mass culture and consumption; the spatial organization of American culture; the construction of American identities and subcultures; and the local, national and transnational dimensions of American culture and politics. Monographs we’re likely to read include Camacho’s *Migrant Imaginaries*, Fleetwood’s *Troubling Vision*, Klein’s *Cold War Orientalism*, Moreton’s *To Serve God and Walmart*, Muhammad’s *The Condemnation of Blackness*, Osman’s *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*, and Vazquez’s *Listening in Detail*. Registration restricted to graduate students.

**AMST 6190.80 – Displaying Jewish Culture: Landmark Exhibitions on Judaism and the Jewish Experience**  
Jenna Weissman Joselit  
W, 5:10-7:00 CRN: 67235  
Museums have become one of society’s most powerful phenomena. Whether their subject is art, antiquities, religion, science or history, they have moved from the margins to the very center of modern culture where their visual and discursive conventions have been put to varied use: Disseminating knowledge, promoting tolerance, shaping public opinion and, on more than one occasion, even provoking hatred.  
Objects of curiosity, the Jews as well as their religious and cultural practices were the subject of a number of landmark exhibitions in the 19th and 20th centuries. From the Anglo-Jewish *Historical Exhibition* of 1887, which constituted them as an integral part of the British Empire, to *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) of 1937 in which they were set apart and demonized by the Nazis, the medium of the exhibition has been actively deployed in representing the Jews. Drawing on a wide raft of sources, from exhibition catalogues, original photographs and contemporaneous newspaper accounts to the secondary, theoretical literature, and supplemented by field trips and guest lectures, this course explores the intricate relationship between modernity and the visual, public display of the Jews and of Judaism. *Registration restricted to graduate students.*

**AMST 6495.80 – Historic Preservation: Principles and Methods**  
Richard Longstreth  
MW, 4:10–6:00 CRN: 66983  
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 6530.10 – Field Methods: Architectural Documentation
Thomas Reinhart
W, 6:10-8:00 CRN: 67448
The course offers in-depth, thematic study of the cultural landscape, focusing on the basic field techniques and skills necessary to analyze and interpret accurately the fabric of historic buildings and their settings. Additional attention is given to major thematic issues of both rural and urban landscapes. Topics considered include housing, agriculture, industry, and the architectural legacy of African American culture. A variety of building types and complexes are examined firsthand, with emphasis on the broader issue of interplay between natural and cultural landscapes. Intensive study is conducted on a single site, with members of the class divided into recording teams. Research methods based on building fabric and the physical landscape are the primary focus; work in the field constitutes a major component of the course. The course format consists of a weekly lecture; four, one-day field trips on Saturdays or Sundays as selected by class members; and a final exam. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6709.80 – Interpretation in the Historic House Museum
Carol Stapp
T, 11:10–1:00 CRN: 64319
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 CRN: 62545
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.