

American Studies Course Descriptions

FALL 2017

Revised: 4/17/17

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: Washington Sex Scandals

Chad Heap

MW, 2:20-3:35

CRN: 83059

The release of a videotape of Donald Trump's lewd conversation about women with Access Hollywood host Billy Bush, Trump's attempts to revisit the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair during the recent presidential campaign, and Congressman Anthony Weiner's sexually suggestive tweets: These are just a few of the sex-related scandals that have preoccupied Washington in recent years. Yet, no matter how contemporary such topics might seem, they are but the latest in a long history of sexual controversies in the federal government, dating back at least to our first Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton's affair with Maria Reynolds. Focusing on several incidents in the recent and more distant past, this seminar will ask not only what the history of Washington's sex scandals can tell us about Americans' changing attitudes toward sexuality over the past two centuries but also how a careful examination of these scandals can provide new insights into broader historical transformations in American culture and politics, including the shifting contours of American citizenship and the definition of the nation, the shaping of political ideologies and party warfare, the emergence of mass media and its effects on molding public opinion, and the reconfiguration of the boundary between public and private in American life. *Registration restricted to CCAS freshman.*

AMST 1000.11: Zombie Capitalism

Dara Orenstein

T, 12:45-3:15

CRN: 85708

The Walking Dead. World War Z. "Obama Zombies." Why does the specter of the living dead loom so largely in contemporary U.S. culture? How is it useful? What does it illuminate about the relationship between capitalism and democracy that might otherwise remain inscrutable? And how has it served in this allegorical manner throughout modern U.S. history? How did it haunt the rise of mass production, or the growth of suburbs, or the eruption of a social movement like Occupy Wall Street? To answer such questions, in this seminar we will track the figure of the zombie from the Gilded Age to the crash of 2008, and from the sugar plantations of Depression-era Haiti and Louisiana to the tents of Zuccotti Park. Our syllabus will range across the humanities and social sciences, encompassing, to cite a few examples, the writings of Karl Marx, the films of George Romero, and the genre of the Zombie Survival Guide. Students will be expected to view a total of 11 films outside of class, to read an average of 2 articles or essays per week as well as 1 novel, to contribute to a class blog each week, to give 2 oral presentations in class during the semester, and to write a final paper.

AMST 1100.10: Politics and Film

Elisabeth Anker

M, 11:10-12:25 and M, 7:10-9:40

CRN: 84596

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 2000.10: Nature & Culture of Children

Jamie Cohen-Cole

MW, 11:10-12:25

CRN: 86708

The sciences and philosophy ask hard questions: What is the nature of knowledge? What characteristics define humanity? How much does culture matter? It turns out that these questions have provoked fierce disagreements for how we understand, raise, and educate children. They are tied to our visions of morality, politics, education, and the shape we want the future to take. This seminar adopts a historical approach to see how these questions and the debates about children have been approached by philosophers, biologists, anthropologists, and psychologists.

AMST 2010.80: Early American Cultural History

Staff

TR, 3:45-4:35

CRN: 82912

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: 85951

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.

AMST 2350.80: U.S. Religion and Politics

Joseph Kip Kosek
WF, 9:35-10:25
CRN: 85306

This course explores the history of religion in American politics and public life. It addresses several key questions: Is the United States a religious nation, a secular nation, or some of each? When has religion promoted, or prevented, bigotry, conflict, and violence? What exactly do we mean by "separation of church and state?" In what ways has religion shaped the politics of gender and race? What is the relationship of religion to American democracy? Specific topics include the formation of the Constitution, the Civil War, immigration, World War II, the civil rights movement, the Christian Right, and American Islam. *Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.*

AMST 2520.80: American Architecture 1600-1860

Phil Jacks
MW, 9:35-10:50
CRN: 87259

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 2600.10: U.S Pop Music and Culture

Gayle Wald

MW, 3:45-4:35

CRN: 87584

This course uses U.S. popular music—from spirituals to rock-and-roll to country to hip hop to go-go (DC's indigenous popular music)—as a lens for thinking critically about identity, culture, and history from the 19th century to the present. We will approach popular music as a form of cultural production and expression that sheds light on identity, history, and politics. Students will have the chance to learn about concepts of appropriation, authenticity, commodification, and fandom. The course requires substantial reading and frequent writing, and it culminates in “Critical Karaoke”—an oral presentation set to a favorite song. Sample syllabus available through Blackboard.

AMST 2610.10: Science, Technology and Politics in Modern America

Jamie Cohen-Cole

MW, 12:45-1:35

CRN: 87721

This course examines the history of science and technology and their role in political and social life from the late nineteenth century to the present as well as the ways in which the science depended on historical developments. Among the questions we will consider are: How has society, culture, and politics developed and changed because of technical developments ranging from electricity to the automobile, the internet, and biotechnology? What difference did technologies like nuclear weapons and computers make to the Cold War? How has social science work from SAT tests to economic modeling shaped political culture and defined meritocracy? How have new scientific conceptions of the environment, of race and gender, of the market, and of modernity been impacted by new meanings of citizenship, democracy, and the nation state? How have struggles over science from evolution to global warming shaped our political culture?

AMST 2730W.80: World War II in History and Memory

Tom Guglielmo

MW, 9:35-10:50

CRN: 86715

This course examines Americans' World War II experiences and how those experiences have been studied, debated, understood, and “remembered”—officially, culturally, and personally. It focuses on six overlapping topics—soldiers, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Holocaust, women, Japanese American internment, and African Americans. Throughout the course, my aim is for students to deepen their interest in and knowledge about America's World War II history and memory; to think carefully, creatively, and critically about World War II – and about history more generally; and to improve their writing through practice, revision, and peer review.

AMST 2750W.80: Latinos in the United States

Elaine Pena

MW, 12:45-2:00

CRN: 84798

The U.S. Census Bureau projects that Latinos will make up the majority minority 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. Using transnational and

hemispheric frameworks, we will engage ethnographic and historical analyses, literary works, and films that explore Latino community formation across geographic regions in the United States and beyond. One of the goals of this course is to not only identify how transnational and hemispheric historical, political, and economic changes have shaped the term Latino but also connect those processes to contemporary understandings of immigration policy and political participation.

AMST 3352.80: U.S Women's History to 1865

STAFF

MW, 9:35-10:50

CRN: 86720

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.

AMST 3360.80: African American History to 1865

Erin Chapman

MW, 2:20-3:35

CRN: 87151

In this course, we will explore the major themes and concepts emerging from the early history of the African presence in the Americas and in the new nation known as the United States of America. A major focus of this course will be the emergence and evolving significance of the concept of race. We will study the ways in which race evolved to justify and facilitate the new regime of Atlantic slavery and how race intersected with gender, economics, religion, and nationality. We will approach the history of the development of the New World and the first century of the United States from the perspective of people of African descent. We will study Africans' and African Americans' experiences in slavery and freedom, the dynamic oppression they faced, the communities and institutions they built, and the racial advancement politics they formed. We will thus study both the significance of race in the formation of the United States and the roles of the African Americans who helped to construct that new nation.

AMST 3900.10: Critiquing Culture

Dara Orenstein

TR, 4:45-6:00

CRN: 86721

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 3950.80: Science and the Visual Arts

David Bjelajac

T, 3:30-6:00

CRN: 84797

This course explores the visual arts in relation to a wide range of natural and human sciences. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century artists' handbooks described the physical, chemical properties of pigments and painting media, while painters and color theorists variously responded to Sir Isaac Newton's *Opticks* (1704) and subsequent investigations into the physical properties of light that later were supplemented by ophthalmological studies of eyes and eyesight. Covering several centuries, the course will consider the manner in which artists represented New World flora and fauna and created landscapes informed by the study of natural history, geology and geography. The course will examine the aesthetics of the sublime in relation to the discourses of alchemy, cosmology, psychology and psychiatry. We will examine how aesthetics and visual arts were intertwined with evolutionary theories of human development, involving issues of race, gender and class. For Gilded Age collectors and patrons, the visual arts were of therapeutic value for treating neurasthenia or nervous disorders caused by the urban, capitalist distancing of American civilization from its mythic rootedness as "nature's nation".

AMST 3950W.80: Black Radicalism

Erin Chapman

M, 11:10-1:00

CRN: 87152

In this WID seminar, we will study the radical side of the 20th century black freedom movement, including feminism, nationalism, varieties of Marxism, and combinations of these. Although African American activists continued to draw upon these radical praxes throughout the black freedom movement, the historiography of the traditional civil rights era is only beginning to address their significance. Therefore, this course will emphasize the northern and Midwestern arenas of the black freedom movement where historians have better documented the ways in which black radicalism remained at the forefront of activists' social criticism and strategies. Readings may include historical monographs, biographies, speeches, essays, and scholarly articles by black radical artists, activists, and scholars from throughout the 20th century. Assignments will include weekly reading responses and papers based on class reading assignments and additional primary sources.

AMST 4500W.10: Democratic Cultures

Elisabeth Anker

M, 3:30-6:00

CRN: 87739

This course will satisfy a WID requirement

This is an advanced research seminar for American Studies majors, with a thematic focus on the varieties and practices of democratic cultures in America. Students will undertake original, independent research on a related topic of their choosing, using a combination of historical research and cultural criticism. Importantly, each project will need to define and defend what, exactly, democracy 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.

AMST 4702W.80: Race, Medicine, and Public Health

Vanessa NorthingtonGamble

MW, 12:45-2:00

CRN: 84796

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.*

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AMST 6100.10: Scope and Methods in American Studies

Joseph Kip Kosek

F, 12:30-2:20

CRN: 82411

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: Nation, Migration, & Walls

Elaine Pena

R, 5:10-7:00

CRN: 84677

“You show me a 50-foot wall and I’ll show you a 51-foot ladder at the border. That’s the way the [U.S.-Mexico] border works,” then Governor of Arizona Janet Napolitano told the Associated Press in 2005. More than ten years later, plans to build a “giant wall” are still in play. This graduate seminar asks why constructing a wall is often a go-to answer for many heads of state seeking to protect national interests. It also asks, what, if anything, does that default answer tell us about national security logics and issues of religion, race or ethnicity? The course explores the long history of barrier construction efforts between the United States and Mexico alongside immigration policy shifts, in response to 9/11, and in real time. The course also draws our attention to on-going construction efforts of fences and barriers in border zones across the globe [i.e. India, Israel, Hungary] as well as the planning of “gated communities” to mark off space within cities. Seminar readings draw from cultural anthropology, political science, geography, and social history to deepen our understanding of nationalism and ethnonationalism, anxieties linked to unauthorized economic migrants, unaccompanied minors, and refugees, security’s relationship to territory, “tactical infrastructure,” and the notion of “the insecure American.”

AMST 6431.80: Gender, Sexuality, and American Culture II

Chad Heap

T, 5:10-7:00

CRN: 86722

This graduate seminar explores the usefulness of gender and sexuality as categories of analysis in American culture. Focusing on the period since the Civil War, we will read broadly across the field of sexuality and gender studies in US social and cultural history, performance studies, ethnography, media and popular culture studies, and critical theory. We will examine the roles that gender and sexuality have played in shaping American culture from the late-nineteenth to the early-twenty-first century; 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, and the body; the spatial organization of gender and sexuality in relation to the city, the suburbs, the state, and globalization; and the role that cultural discourses and products—possibly including music, television, film, print media, stage performances, medicine, science, and the law—play in shaping the popular understanding of sexuality and gender and vice versa.

AMST 6450.80: Race in America

Tom Guglielmo

T, 12:00-2:00

CRN: 86723

This class will offer an interdisciplinary history of race and racism in the modern United States. Reading a mixture of theoretical and empirical texts, we will explore topics as diverse as Jim Crow and immigration, mass incarceration and settler colonialism, racial capitalism and white nationalism, Islamophobia and Japanese American internment; civil rights and Black Lives Matter. Along the way we will consider specific historical questions about particular times and places as well as broader theoretical ones about structure and agency; power and resistance; state and society; local, national, and transnational scales of analysis; social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of life; relational and reflexive scholarship; and the intersections between -- among other things -- sexuality, gender, class, and race.

AMST 6710.10 – American Material Culture

Katherine Ott

W, 1:30–3:30

CRN: 82114

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 otk@si.edu for location details.