AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Spring ~ 2009

Revised: 12/4/09

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

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/

AMST 072W.10 – Introduction to American Studies (WID)
Prof. Phyllis Palmer
TR 11:10 – 12:00
This class is a survey of U.S. history and culture from 1890-2000, presented through a combination of readings, visual texts, and lectures. One major theme of the course will be the complex interactions between the United States and the rest of the world - interactions that include multi-directional flows of people, culture, and ideas, as well as foreign policy and national politics. The course will also include sustained attention to issues of race and ethnicity, religion, social movements, and mass culture. This course satisfies a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.

AMST 160.10 – Material Culture in America
Prof. John Vlach
M 2:20 – 3:35 and W 3:45 – 5:00
This course will provide students with the skills to interpret the cultural messages imbedded in our material surroundings. This vast subject area, generally referred to as material culture, is made up of all sorts of humanly created artifacts ranging from specific objects to vast landscapes. The things around us can be read as texts in ways that parallel the way that we draw meaning from books and other written documentation. These tangible "texts" are particularly important as evidence of cultural values in view of the facts that 1) so few people actually leave written records about their everyday experiences and 2) material goods are an important factor in shaping the character of American life. Following an orientation to the principle modes of material culture analysis, our work will consist of exercises in observing, recording, describing, and interpreting various classes of artifacts. A list of prime targets includes places (neighborhoods, work sites, water fronts, parks, shopping malls, central business districts, etc.), buildings (houses, schools, churches, stores, theaters, courthouses, etc.), and objects (tools, clothing, furnishings, artworks, etc.). We will be looking for what these spaces, places, structures, and things might tell us about their designers, makers, users, and consumers. Finally we will try to assemble these particular messages into a collective portrait of social life in the US. Course requirements include weekly readings, three papers, and a final exam.

AMST 167.80 – Race & US Post-WWII Cities
Prof. Suleiman Osman
TR 2:20 – 3:10
This course will examine the history of race and ethnicity in postwar American cities. What have been the “great migrations” that have shaped the American city? How have the changing tensions between immigrants, African-Americans, and their descendents shaped the political institutions, language of reform, racial ideology, ethnic identity, and built environment of the city? How has the evolving cityscape reshaped the relationship between African-Americans, “whites,” and different waves of immigrants? The
course will examine the history of cityscapes as varied as inner-city Detroit, suburban immigrant Los Angeles, and gentrifying Washington DC. *Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.*

**AMST 167W.80 – Freedom in US Thought & Popular Culture**
Prof. Elisabeth Anker  
WF 2:20 – 3:10
America was founded on the premise of providing freedom to its people. But what, exactly, is “freedom”? Is it doing what you want or is it participation in politics? Is it about escaping domination or does it require sharing power? These questions have been debated in America since its founding. The course will examine varied answers to these questions provided by American thought and popular culture. We will intertwine the study of theoretical texts with cultural analysis to examine authors from Jefferson to Thoreau, speeches from Martin Luther King to George W. Bush, films from *High Noon* to *Minority Report*, and the video art of Jeremy Blake. Together, we will explore how concepts of freedom and anxieties over freedom’s possibility take cultural form. While we may not settle the question of what freedom is or how to produce it, we will learn both to appreciate its complexity and to critically engage its operations in American public life. *This course satisfies a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.*

**AMST 167.90 – Performance & Culture in the Americas**
Prof. Elaine Peña  
MW 11:10 – 12:00
This course is premised on the idea that performances are not limited to the stage or even the streets. When we communicate with one another we are performing, for example. But what are the links between these everyday performances and more extraordinary performances? We will begin by asking the question, what is performance? What does it mean to perform? In seeking answers to these questions, we will explore the larger field of performance studies. We will also explore the cultures of the Americas, particularly Latin America, through ethnographies of performance and through the work of major performance artists of the Americas. With this inter-American approach to cultural production, we will explore how race, gender, and sexuality are performed in different venues of the Americas. We will also ask how issues of class and socio-political circumstances are integral to these performances. As a result, we will engage questions about the meaning and importance of cultural differences. *Students must also register for a discussion section.*

**AMST 167.95 – Jews in 20th Century American Popular Culture**
Prof. Lauren Strauss (History Dept.)  
TR 11:10 – 12:25
The partnership between Jews and American culture in the 20th and early 21st centuries has been a fruitful one and bears significance for the study of both Jews in an open society and minority groups in American culture. We will address questions of identity and social change, as well as the influence of politics, through such creative outlets as Tin Pan Alley and Vaudeville, the American film industry, the fine arts and comics industries, television, the Broadway musical, photography, the folk revival and other popular music, and comedy. A small sampling of the names we will encounter includes: Irving Berlin, Sophie Tucker, George Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein, Jerome Robbins, Woody Allen, Art Spiegelman, Superman, Molly Berg, Lenny Bruce, Adam Sandler, Barbra Streisand, Jerry Seinfeld, Steven Spielberg, and Mattisyahu.

**AMST 167.96 – Race & Politics in America Since 1945**  
Prof. Mary Ellen Curtin (History Dept.)  
TR 9:35 – 10:50

**AMST 167.97 – Race & Politics in America Since 1945**  
Prof. Mary Ellen Curtin (History Dept.)  
TR 2:20 – 3:35
AMST 167.98 – Black Women in US History
Prof. Mary Ellen Curtin (History Dept.)
R 11:10 – 1:00

AMST 168W.10 – Cultural Criticism in America (WID)
Prof. Melani McAlister
TR 12:45-2:00
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 points 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 writing-intensive, discussion-oriented, and fulfills the WID requirement. This course satisfies a WID requirement. Non-majors will be admitted only by permission of the instructor.

AMST 176.80 – American Architecture: 1860 – Present
Prof. Richard Longstreth
MW 12:45 – 2:00
This course examines selected aspects of the built environment in the United States from the Gilded Age to the eve of World War II. Stylistic properties, functions, common tendencies of design, technological developments, and urban patterns are introduced as vehicles for interpreting the historical significance of these periods; e.g., buildings are analyzed as artifacts and signifiers of broader social, cultural, and economic tendencies. Other topics include the persistence and mixing of cultural traditions, the role of the designer, the influence of region, and architecture as a component of landscape. We will examine facets of the built environment, including: the changing, multi-faceted nature of eclecticism; the exponential growth of metropolitan areas; the emergence and development of tall commercial buildings; the rise of a comprehensive approach to planning; the enduring importance of the single-family house; evolving views of nature and landscape design; the pursuit of fantasy and reality in design; the impact of mass transportation systems and motor vehicles on the landscape; the reluctant acceptance of modernism; and the varied impacts of technology. The course covers the works of Burnham, Furness, Charles and Henry Greene, Gill, Hunt, McKim, Neutra, Richardson, Root, Schindler, Stickley, White, and Wright. Attention is also given to the impact of immigrants, new ideas from abroad, and the effects of design upon suburban and urban landscapes.

AMST 180W.10 – Proseminar in American Studies: Changing America
Prof. Kip Kosek
R 10:00 – 12:00
This research seminar focuses on individuals, groups, and social movements that have tried to reform American politics, culture, and society in the 20th and 21st centuries. We will explore how ideas for reform have arisen, how they have spread, how those ideas have changed over time, how reform coalitions have come together and broken apart, and how attempts to change America have succeeded or failed. Topics of inquiry may include: environmentalism, the civil rights movement, Prohibition, feminism, the pro-life movement, or attempts to restrict immigration. Each student will write a substantial paper based on independent research in primary sources. The course concludes in a public symposium where majors present their research projects.

AMST 180W.11 – Proseminar in American Studies: 20th Century American Pop Culture
Jeremy Hill
T 4:00 – 6:00
This research seminar focuses on the products and the production of American popular culture in the 20th
century. We will analyze cultural products as key pieces of their particular historical moment and think about the multiple ideas, beliefs, and values which they both addressed and produced. Pop culture suggests a broad range of media and part of the focus of the class will be trying to figure out what “counts” as pop culture and why. Each student will write a substantial paper based on independent research in primary sources. The wide variety of possible topics could include such artifacts as comic books, music videos, and print advertisements, as well as literature, film, and television. The course concludes in a public symposium where majors present their research projects.

AMST 194.80 – Historical Archeology
Prof. Pamela Cressey (Anthropology Dept.)
T 3:30 – 5:00

AMST 195.10 – Independent Study
Department Chair
Must register with department approval and an assigned advisor. Contact amst@gwu.edu

AMST 198.10 – Postwar Transformations: US Culture in the 1950s
Lars Lierow
W 12:10 – 2:00
This seminar will examine the transformations American culture underwent after the Second World War, during the period that roughly coincides with the 1950s. Discussion topics include: the impact of cold war politics, the expansion of consumer culture, the civil rights movement, the role of science fiction, mass media, and television, the beat generation, and competing gender ideals. The seminar will utilize primary documents from the period as well as historical texts in order to interrogate buzz words like “cold war,” “civil rights,” “conformity,” and “rebel without a cause.” Students are expected to participate actively in class discussion, produce brief writings based on their readings, and compose a short final paper.

AMST 198.11 – Early American Culture
Prof. Teresa Murphy
F 12:00 – 3:00
This course will focus on readings in American cultural history, from the colonial period through the early nineteenth century. We will read theoretical and applied works from a variety of disciplines that examine how culture was created and how cultural ideals affected power relations. We will pay particular attention to how ideas of race and gender were formed and how they were deployed, as well as to questions of how nationalism and the public sphere were symbolically organized during this period.

AMST 198.12 – American Foodways: History, Culture, Context
Prof. Shelly McKenzie
TR 2:20 – 3:35
Everyone eats. This simple statement illustrates why the study of food—its history, its production and consumption, as well as the more intangible concepts we often associate with eating, such as community, family and love—is relevant to the daily lives of all human beings. Within the last 30 years the study of food has been recognized as a full-fledged academic discipline, with peer-reviewed journals, textbooks, and a sizeable body of scholarship intended for both expert and popular audiences. Even more recently many Americans have become intensely interested in the origin, preparation, and selection of the foods that compose their diet. This class asks students to consider how their decisions regarding food implicate them in a complicated matrix of politics, tradition, and consumerism. In the first part of this advanced undergraduate course we’ll study the history of American eating habits to understand the historical forces that have shaped the modern American diet. The second half of the course will address the cultural issues related to eating and food choices. Ideas about race, gender, normative body shape, and morality are both expressed and masked in our food selections. We’ll examine food’s role in the making of personal identity as well as the very fraught nature of modern eating choices.
AMST 198W.10 – Seminar: The Veteran Returns
Charity Fox
W 2:10 – 4:00
This readings course will focus on war veterans and their experiences upon returning to civilian American society in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. We will use historical sources and secondary readings to understand and interpret how veterans are imagined and represented in popular media (film, television, radio, news broadcasts, and more). We will also examine cultural and social expectations placed on veterans and the difficulties faced by soldiers and civilians alike when transitioning from war time to peace time. This WID course is reading and writing intensive and discussion oriented. This course satisfies a WID requirement.

DEAN'S SEMINARS

AMST 801.10 – American Popular Culture Post- 9/11
Prof. Elisabeth Anker
WF 9:35 – 10:50
This course will critically examine how films, literature, television, and contemporary art interpret the dramatic shifts in American public life after 9/11. Together we will question how important events are represented and refigured in American cultural material, and also analyze what this material can show us about the times in which we live. This course is divided into three sections: First, we will explore interpretations of 9/11 and its aftermath. Second, we will engage material that grapples with the current Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Last, we will examine how various cultural forms have investigated, and perhaps contributed to, a national climate of fear, uncertainty, and violence. Given the themes of this course, we also will pay close attention to current events, and in particular to how cultural tropes are employed to make sense of them. The course will include a visit to the Smithsonian. Our assignments will include critical cultural analysis and an original research project. This course is restricted to first-year undergraduates.

AMST 801.11 – America in the Twenties
Prof. Kip Kosek
F 12:45 – 3:15
This seminar asks how the United States became “modern” during the decade of the 1920s. That astonishing period produced the literary experiments of Ernest Hemingway, the musical innovations of Louis Armstrong, and the new sexual regime marked by Margaret Sanger’s controversial birth control campaign. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the First World War, the nation achieved the status of a world power, extending political and economic influence around the globe. The Twenties also saw dramatic antimodern protests: domestic terrorism in the 1920 Wall Street bombing, religious fundamentalism in the 1925 Scopes trial, and virulent racism in the resurgent Ku Klux Klan. We will examine film, literature, political speeches, music, and photography to uncover the historical roots of American modernity. This course is restricted to first-year undergraduates.
GRADUATE COURSES

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/

AMST 253.10 – American Decorative Arts (Smithsonian)
Prof. Nancy Davis
M 2:10 – 4:00
How do we define “home”? Is it a place to hang our hat, a machine for living, or a container for our material goods? How does the aspect of home relate to the concepts of family, private life, and community activities? This course will examine how American homes have changed from the 17th to the 21st century. Our focus will be on the material aspects of homes, their furnishings, their technological systems, and their architecture, with a broad approach to issues and theories. Emphasis will be given to goods as personal or community property, and their practical, social and symbolic uses. Course will be taught at the Smithsonian. Please contact DavisNE@si.edu for details.

AMST 256.10 – Folklore Theory
Prof. John Vlach
M 4:10 – 6:00
This course presents a survey of the intellectual history of the development of the academic field of folklore and folklife study in the United States. We will trace the rise of various theories of culture, modes of analysis, and tactics of interpretation starting in the second half of the nineteenth century and concluding with contemporary times. The class will be conducted in a semi-seminar fashion. The instructor will lecture for the first half of each class meeting with discussion being lead by a designated student or students for the second half. Student discussions will focus on the biographical profiles of key figures whose careers are emblematic of particular interpretive techniques or positions. These individuals include many of the outstanding leaders in the fields of literature, social science, and museum work. In addition to participation in class discussions, student will be expected to write a seminar paper (20-25 pages) on some aspect of American folklore theory. The specific topic will be selected in consultation with the instructor.

AMST 262.80 – US and the World
Prof. Melani McAlister & Prof. Andrew Zimmerman
W 3:30 – 6:00
This graduate readings seminar, co-taught by Prof. McAlister and Prof. Zimmerman from the History Dept., explores the transnational histories of which the United States is a part. The readings are oriented toward historiographic and theoretical questions about the nature of empire and the role of the nation-state, the problematic of economic globalization, and the significance of the global flows of people and culture into and out of the United States. The course is in part an examination of the politics of borders and the possibilities or limits of identity; at the same time, it is a study of historical and theoretical frameworks that historians and cultural theorists have brought to bear in exploring those issues. Readings are likely to include work by Agamben, Stoler, Hardt & Negri, and Marx, as well as Kevin Gaines, Uta Poiger, Daniel Rodgers, and Paul Kramer.

AMST 282.10 – American Architecture
Prof. Richard Longstreth
W 4:10 – 6:00
During the fifteen-year period after World War II, the shape and character of the American landscape experienced profound changes. The highly centralized organization of cities that had dominated growth
patterns since the early republic began decisively to shift to more diffuse patterns. Industrial production became ever more scattered and relied on sophisticated technological processes. Corporate offices likewise were relocating into what were formerly considered rural or quasi-rural sites. Retail activities regrouped along arteries far removed from the city center. Suburban residential development occurred at an accelerated pace and for the first time lay within reach of a major segment of the populace. At the same time, the urban core was experiencing accelerated decay and became subject to massive clearance programs. Central and outlying sections alike were shaped and reshaped by massive highway construction programs. A variety of renewal programs captured the limelight, but few proved effective in reversing the prevalent trend. Design was also experiencing significant changes. Only recently cast as extreme and freakish, avant-garde modernism rose to the fore in architectural training and also in building campaigns for commerce, industry, and education. The US now led the world in fostering a rich spectrum of approaches to design that made the environment of preceding decades seem markedly dated. Among other topics explored are the impact of widespread motor vehicle use on the metropolis, the rise of a mass consumer market for goods and housing, fundamental shifts in popular taste, critical views of the city, and the undercurrent of persistence in traditional patterns of settlement. Participants may choose from a wide range of topics concerning architecture, landscape, urbanism, as well as cultural, economic, social, and technological factors that have an impact on the built environment for their research paper.

AMST 284.10 – American Photography: Theory and Practice
Prof. Frank Goodyear
M 6:10 – 8:00
Over the course of the last 170 years, photography has emerged as the dominant visual medium in American society. Photographic images have played a central role in mediating our understanding of the different social, political, and cultural landscapes in America. This graduate seminar will consider the many ways in which photography has been practiced by individuals, theorized by visual culture scholars, and incorporated into American life. We will look especially at the unique nature of the medium and interrogate the different traditions and usages that have grown up around it. Readings will comprise a selection of recent books on the theory and practice of photography in America. Students will be required to complete two writing assignments. The first assignment is a five-page critical review of the book you chose to report on. This essay will be due one week after your in-class report. It is expected that this essay will be more than a summary of the book’s contents, but will be rather a paper that interrogates its methods and conclusions. Each student will also research and write a 15 to 20 page essay on an original topic in this field. During the final three weeks of the semester, students will have an opportunity to present their research to the class.

AMST 289.10 - Preservation as Public Policy
Prof. de Teel Patterson Tiller
R 4:10 – 6:00
This class builds professional skills in heritage public policy criticism. Through readings, written analyses, and discussions, students develop critical assessment skills by analyzing selected past, current and evolving U.S. heritage laws, regulations, and administrative procedures at the local, state, tribal, and national levels. Oftentimes this is accomplished through comparative analyses with international counterparts. Understanding better the key attributes that make for effective heritage public policy and applying these critically through comparative analysis of existing heritage policy practices provides important professional skills. The class explores such important questions as: what are the policy goals; how do you measure success; what is the cost; what is the public benefit; who are the constituents; what are their interests; what public support is there; and, what opposition exists and why? Of paramount importance is the idea that every heritage law or public policy has multiple and often conflicting points of special interest, view, and support / opposition. And that the most effective public policy is one that anticipates these, or changes with them, ensuring the optimum public benefit and effectiveness all the while preserving our nation’s heritage patrimony for future generations. Topics to be explored include: is
heritage an appropriate interest of the state; cultural biases in current heritage public policies; the influence of growing cultural diversity on heritage public policies; and, analyses of current heritage policy issues before the Congress and the American people today.

**AMST 289.80 – Research Seminar in 20\textsuperscript{th} Century American Culture**
Prof. Suleiman Osman
R 6:10 – 8:00
In this graduate-level workshop, students will conduct primary research on an American Studies topic, ultimately producing an article-length paper. While conducting their own research, students will read and comment on each other's work throughout the semester. Along with being introduced to the major themes in urban and cultural history, students will be encouraged to become familiar with local archives in the Washington metro area. *Registration restricted to graduate students only.*

**AMST 289.81 – Performance as Object and Method**
Prof. Elaine Peña
M 2:10 – 4:00
This seminar critically engages performance-oriented research monographs. Course readings place performances of nationalism, violence, class, memory, migration, race, sexuality and/or gender at the center of inquiry. Challenging the theory/practice binary, a few of the texts also utilize embodied performance as methodology, as a way of knowing. Alternating theoretical texts with examples of how those ideas are used on the ground, this course should prove useful to graduate students in the throes of developing a research project.

**AMST 289.82 – Region and Section in 19th Century American History**
Prof. Richard Stott (History Dept.)
M 5:10 – 7:00
Frederick Jackson Turner believed that “frontier and section are two of the most fundamental factors in American history.” This course will examine works of American history and geography on frontier and regions, focusing on the nineteenth-century South and West.

For the following independent courses: *Students must register with department approval and an assigned advisor. Since credits for these courses can range from 1-12, the approved number of credits must be specified during the registration process.*

**AMST 295.10 – Independent Study: MA students only**
**AMST 299.10 – Thesis Research: MA students only**
**AMST 300.10 – Thesis Research: MA students only**
**AMST 398.10 – Adv. Reading & Research: PhD students only**
**AMST 399.10 – Dissertation Research: PhD students only**

**CCAS 920.10 – Continuing Research: MA students only**
Master’s students who have met their credit requirements, but are still working on research to complete their degree must register for this Columbian College (CCAS) one-credit course in lieu of an American Studies (AMST) course. *Students must register with department approval and an assigned advisor.*

**CCAS 940.10 – Continuing Research: PhD students only**
Doctoral students who have met their credit requirements, but are still working on research to complete their degree must register for this Columbian College (CCAS) one-credit course in lieu of an American Studies (AMST) course. *Students must register with department approval and an assigned advisor.*