American Studies Course Descriptions
SPRING 2012

Revised: 10/28/11

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
WF, 12:45–2:00
Congressman Anthony Weiner’s sexually suggestive tweets, Congressman Chris Lee’s email exchanges via Craigslist, Congressman Eric Massa’s alleged sexual harassment of male staffers: These are a few of the sex scandals that have preoccupied Washington during the past couple years. Yet, no matter how contemporary such topics might seem, they are but the latest in a long history of sexual controversies in Washington, dating back at least to the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. 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 2011.80 – Modern American Cultural History
Kip Kosek
TR, 12:45–1:35
This course examines the history of the United States from Reconstruction to the present using culture as its central organizing concept. We will define culture broadly to encompass customs, beliefs, and practices, as well as more specific forms of literary and artistic expression. Central themes of the course include: the rise of consumer culture; the role of mass media in shaping a national culture; the impact of cultural values on the physical landscape; changes in racial formations and ethnic affiliations; cultural meanings of gender identities; and the political power of cultural conflict. We will also consider transnational influences on American culture and, conversely, the effects of American culture abroad. The course draws on many different kinds of primary sources, including memoirs, short stories, films, political speeches, music, photographs, and television shows. In addition, we will read analyses of culture from a variety of scholars and develop our own interpretations. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

Amanda Huron
MW, 2:20–3:35 & F, 1:45–2:45
This course is open only to 2011-2012 Civic House students. The goal of the course is to introduce students to Washington, D.C., and to foster an understanding of the city’s unique history, culture and politics. We use the city as a classroom, with student assignments tied to explorations of the city and its neighborhoods. Through readings, discussions, and working with students at a local public middle school on their own neighborhood history projects, we learn
about what makes Washington, D.C. such a special – and complicated – place. By the end of this class, Civic House students will have a rich understanding of the everyday life of neighborhoods beyond the city’s marble monuments.

**AMST 2125.80 – Varieties of Feminist Theory**  
Jennifer Nash  
MW, 9:35–10:50  
It is now commonplace to talk about feminism in the plural. But what does this move towards talking about feminisms – or feminist theories – actually mean? This course is an exploration of the varieties of ways that feminists engage in theory-making, and the strategies they use to connect their theories to a pursuit of social justice. Over the course of the semester, we will become familiar with a host of feminist projects including: dominance feminism, critical race feminism, third wave feminism, black feminism, feminist legal theory, and post colonial feminism. As we read a wide array of feminist texts, we will ask how feminism maintains its cohesiveness in the face of so much divergent theory-making, and how feminism can continue to organize – and theorize – across difference.

**AMST 2440.80 – The American City**  
Suleiman Osman  
TR, 9:35–10:25  
This interdisciplinary urban studies course will explore the political, architectural and demographic evolution of a variety of American cities after World War II. Students will learn about the history of postwar cities and will be introduced to contemporary debates about urban planning and policy. The course will also look at cultural representations of cities by artists, musicians, novelists and planners. The course will draw often from examples from the Washington DC metro area. Some of the urban landscapes examined will be the “ghetto,” the Las Vegas Strip, Chinatown, the suburbs, waterfront stadiums, Tysons Corner and other “edge cities,” public housing, and gentrified downtown neighborhoods. The course will include works by Jane Jacobs, Mike Davis, Joel Garreau, Sudhir Venkatesh, Malcolm X and clips from the TV show “The Wire.” Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

**AMST 2490W.10 – The African American Experience**  
Calvin Warren  
MW, 12:45–1:35  
This course will provide a survey of the historical, political, and cultural dimensions of the African American experience. The African American experience is complex and to understand this complexity, we will use multi-disciplinary strategies of reading and interpretation. The course will use primary historical documents, literature, film, and secondary critical sources to investigate the contours of this experience. We will unpack the historical complexity of racial construction and investigate the representation of this complexity. This course will satisfy a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

**AMST 2490W.11 – Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border**  
Elaine Pena  
MW, 11:10–12:00  
This course examines how various popular narratives, political agendas, ideological perspectives, and economic interests have constructed “America” and protected her interests on the U.S.-Mexico border over time. We will focus on 19th century political mandates such as the Monroe Doctrine (1823) and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). But we will pay particular attention to the processes that underpin and advance those mandates: westward expansion/intra-national migration and settlement, frontier zones, steamboat and railway industries, the appropriation of Native American cultures and territories, religious movements, and postcolonial international relations. In addition to reading historical essays, political
commentary, and economic analyses that focus on those processes, we will examine different cinematic and literary representations of life on the border. Some of the films we will analyze and compare include *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *Señorita Extraviada* (2003), and *Machete* (2010). We will also read *George Washington Gómez*, a brilliant novel by Américo Paredes that explores issues of ethnic identification, violence, and American patriotism. *This course will satisfy a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.*

**AMST 2521.80 – American Architecture 1860-Present**
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 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 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. Detailed examination is made of the contribution made by many celebrated figures in design, including Daniel Burnham, Frank Furness, Charles and Henry Greene, Irving Gill, Richard Morris Hunt, Charles McKim, Richard Neutra, Henry Hobson Richardson, John Wellborn Root, R. M. Schindler, Gustav Stickley, Stanford White, and Frank Lloyd Wright. At the same time, attention is given to broad tendencies in design and their effect upon suburban and urban landscapes. The impact immigrants and new ideas from abroad is examined throughout the decades covered. Lectures are profusely illustrated.

**AMST 2532.80 – Introduction to Folklore**
John Vlach
MW, 2:20–3:35
This course offers a survey of some of the major forms of traditional expressive culture in the United States. Examples are drawn from various folk groups and will cover verbal, artifactual, and performance genres such as folktales, crafts, and music. The primary objectives and techniques of folklore scholarship will be discussed and illustrated throughout the course. In addition to lectures and discussion of readings, the class may also feature visits to local museums, the viewing of documentary films and videos, and presentations by visiting experts and folk artists.

**AMST 2710.80 – The US in a Global Context**
Melani McAlister
TR, 11:10–12:00
This course examines post-1945 US history in terms of its cultural and political relationships with the world beyond US borders. The topics covered in the course include global cultural and information flows; the migration and immigrations of peoples across borders; transnational religious communities and social movements; and international humanitarianism. The course is designed to introduce students to transnational models for understanding history. Although the course addresses some issues that are important to the study of US diplomatic history, it is not a course about US foreign policy. Rather, it is an examination of key events, actors, and
historical moments that traverse national boundaries. The course will be organized primarily (but not exclusively) around five key sites of transnational interaction: war, capital, travel/migration, social movements/religion, and popular culture. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

AMST 3353.80 – Women in the United States
Cynthia Harrison
TR, 2:20–3:35
This course will examine the experience of women in their social, economic, and political roles to understand how gender shapes experience. The exploration will include the impact of class, region, race, and ethnicity on women and on gender roles and the effect of the changes in women's roles on men.

AMST 3900.10 – Critiquing Culture
Melani McAlister
TR, 3:45–5:00
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 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.

AMST 3901.10 – Examining America
Elaine Pena
MW, 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.

AMST 3950W.10 – Monuments, Movements, Management: The 20th Century History of Washington, D.C.
Gregory Borchardt
TR, 2:20–3:35
Washington, D.C. is one of America’s most talked about yet least understood cities. Our Nation’s Capital, the Federal City, Chocolate City, 51st State: all of these terms have been applied to the area technically called the District of Columbia. This seminar focuses on the 20th century history of D.C. and the various cultural representations that have been attached to the city. In this course, we will explore the development of Washington’s monumental core. We will examine the multiple demographic and social movements in the city throughout the century, including the Great Migration, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Home Rule Movement. We will also consider the difficulties present in managing and governing a city uniquely positioned
as a federally controlled district. Students will explore current scholarship about D.C., engage in contemporary debates about the city’s spaces, and contribute to scholarship about Washington by producing original research about the city. This course will satisfy a WID requirement.

AMST 3950W.11 – The Postwar American Consumer
Joseph Malherek
MW, 2:20–3:35
This seminar examines the culture and political economy of consumption in postwar America, a time when leaders in government, industry, and labor aligned to make the optimistic, middle-class consumer a patriotic cultural icon. We will trace the evolution of this emblematic figure as the architects of the affluent society came under attack for creating a culture of conformity and mass consumption, and we will consider the ways in which the segmentation of consumer markets presaged the counterculture, social movements, and identity politics that would flourish in the 1960s. Students will be exposed to the most important historical scholarship in the field, and will conduct original research in a range of primary sources, including trade journals, popular magazines, and the records of marketing consultants and advertising agencies. This course will satisfy a WID requirement.

AMST 3950.80 – American Slavery & Its Legacy
Erin Chapman
T, 11:10–1:00
In this course we will study both American slavery and the racial legacies it spawned as they continue to play out in U.S. culture, political traditions, and identity formation. We will read books such as Johnson’s Soul by Soul, Mills’s The Racial Contract, Williams-Forson’s Building Houses out of Chicken Legs, Hartman’s Lose Your Mother, and McElya’s Clinging to Mammy. As we do so, we will consider the widespread influence of notions of race, hierarchy, and means of self-making established through slavery that continue to operate in American society alongside current claims of “post-race” politics and “post-black” identities. Assignments will include reading responses and a paper on some aspect of contemporary racial politics.

AMST 3950W.80 – U.S. Black Feminism 1830-1990
Erin Chapman
R, 11:10–1:00
In this WID-optional seminar, we will study the history of the definition and expression of black feminism, the politics African American women have developed to simultaneously counter both racism and sexism. In the course of the semester, students will develop multiple definitions of black feminism, reflecting the historical dynamics of racial and sexual discourse in the United States. Readings may include historical monographs, biographies (including slave narratives), speeches, essays, novels, poetry, drama, and scholarly articles by black feminist artists, activists, and scholars from the antebellum period through the late 20th century. Assignments will include reading responses and two papers based on class reading assignments and additional primary sources. This course will satisfy a WID requirement.
GRADUATE COURSES

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AMST 6190.10 – African American Cultural Studies
Calvin Warren
W, 3:30–6:00
The seminar will explore the “conceptual architecture” of African American culture—how it is imagined, defined, and sustained. We will wrestle with certain conceptual issues in African American Cultural Studies such as the relationship between archival practice and theoretical inquiry, difference/sameness, the complexity of cultural production, and fractured temporality (modernity). The seminar will examine diverse methodological approaches to these conceptual issues—ranging from Afrocentrism to deconstructive techniques. We will engage theoretical work from Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Molefi Asante, Nahum Chandler, Fred Moten, bell hooks, Sharon Holland, Paul Gilroy, Lindon Barrett, and Maurice Wallace, among others. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6195.10 – Research: Cities, Space & U.S. Culture
Suleiman Osman
R, 2:10–4:00
This graduate research seminar takes as its subject the topic of cities, space and U.S. culture. We will focus on individual research and writing, as well as on reading and commenting on each other’s work. The goal is for each student to produce an original, article-length (25-35 pp.), primary-source-based research essay that can ultimately be submitted to a scholarly journal for publication. Class meetings will focus on developing a research question, identifying primary sources, situating one’s research within existing scholarship, formulating arguments, using evidence, and drafting and revising a clearly written, final essay. Each class member should be prepared to discuss potential research topics at our first seminar meeting. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6195.11 – Research: Citizen and Nation
Teresa Murphy
F, 10:00–12:00
This is a graduate research seminar in which students will produce papers approximately thirty pages in length around topics loosely related to issues of citizenship and nation/nationalism. Students might approach this issue from the standpoint of questions concerning race and/or gender and sexuality as well as from the perspective of religion or politics; they might draw upon 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 these two issues. 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 that can ultimately be submitted to a scholarly journal for publication. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6420.80 – Religion and American Culture
Kip Kosek
T, 4:10–6:00
This graduate seminar focuses on religious people, communities, and cultures in historical and
contemporary America, as well as the shifting categories of “religious” and “secular” themselves. We will consider the ways that serious attention to religion might change our perspective on other subjects, including: race and ethnicity; gender, sexuality, and the family; capitalism and consumer society; scientific knowledge; mass media; social and political movements; material and visual culture; nationalism and transnationalism. The course will also explore how scholars in different fields, such as anthropology, sociology, history, and literature, have brought particular disciplinary lenses to bear on the study of religion. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6450.80 – Race in America
Tom Guglielmo
M, 12:45–3:15
The graduate seminar offers a high-level introduction to the field of critical race studies. We will read and analyze a range of theoretical and empirical work in sociology, philosophy, history, literature, women's studies, political science, American studies, and even popular culture. Along the way we will examine different ways of conceptualizing and studying race and tackle larger questions about identity and power; structure and agency; local, national, and international modes of analysis; and the relationship between race, class, gender, and sexuality. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6480.80 – Theory & Practice of Public History
Marya McQuirter
R, 12:00–1:50
This Public History graduate seminar is a practical and theoretical exploration of history for the general public at museums, historic sites, heritage trails, theme parks, television and radio programs, wikis and universities. Public history is an exciting field because what's at stake is how we (individuals, groups, nations) see ourselves and how others see us. And often those visions clash in culturally and politically interesting ways, as we have witnessed recently with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial exhibit on the National Mall. Students will gain practical knowledge by developing public history projects and will sharpen their critical skills by analyzing interpretive projects locally, nationally and internationally. Students will also have the opportunity to meet and learn from practicing public historians in the DC area. Class requirements include public history projects, class presentations, reviews and active class participation. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6496.80 – Historic Preservation: Principles and Methods
Richard Longstreth
MW, 4:10–6:00
This course investigates selected aspects of contemporary preservation practice in the U.S., including the survey and documentation of historic properties, the nature of historic districts and the changes to which they are subjected over time, the bearing of physical context for historic properties, the meanings of significance in historic preservation and the criteria by which it is determined, and the implications of new design within a preservation framework. The primary focus of this course is on physical aspects of preservation and on the broad issues these aspects represent. While class lectures and discussions will address these concerns in a general way, the opportunity to explore some matters in detail and out in the field will be afforded by the semester assignment. The class will undertake in-depth historical analysis of a neighborhood/community in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, coordinating this work with residents, civic organizations, and local officials. Through detailed survey of properties and research using pertinent archival and published sources, as well as through oral histories and field work, this project will result in a wide-ranging exploration of those characteristics that make the area in question historically significant. Places examined by previous classes range from mid-nineteenth-century agricultural settlements to mid-twentieth-century suburban enclaves, a
portion of the U.S. Route 1 commercial corridor to an urban renewal precinct in Washington. This work has in turn led to a number of National Register and/or local districts as well as thematic studies. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6520.10 – Economics of Preservation
Richard Wagner
R, 4:10–6:00
This course will examine economic factors that contribute to the preservation of historic buildings, districts and landscapes by investigating basic techniques of financial pro formas, market studies, and incentive programs; as well as business planning for preservation and related organizations. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6560.10 – Vernacular Architecture
John Vlach
W, 6:10–8:00
This course will examine that portion of the built environment identified as the vernacular; that is, buildings that derive from local, regional, popular, and folk sources rather than the structures designed by architects or dependent on ‘official styles.’ We will analyze and discuss the buildings of ordinary citizens which, in the main, are dwelling houses and their associated spaces and structures. Over the course of the semester we will not only investigate the range and history of vernacular forms but will also consider various modes of interpretation, the techniques for recording structures, and the uses of vernacular architecture in the museum and preservation professions. Lectures will be supplemented by field trips planned for selected weekends. In addition to participation in class discussions, students will be expected to prepare a seminar paper on some aspect of American vernacular architecture. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6730.10 – American Photography: Theory and Practice
Frank Goodyear
M, 6:10–8:00
Over the course of the last one hundred and seventy 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. Registration restricted to graduate students.