AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE DESCRIPTIONS
SPRING 2014

Revised: 11/4/13

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 – Zombie Capitalism
Dara Orenstein
WF, 9:35–10:50
The Walking Dead. World War Z. “Obama Zombies.” Why does the figure of the living dead loom so largely in contemporary American culture? What does it teach us about economic apocalypse? And, for that matter, about the history of capitalism? How does it relate to the rise of mass production, or to the specter of a social movement like Occupy Wall Street? In this reading-intensive seminar we will track the idea of “zombie capitalism,” from the Gilded Age to the crash of 2008 and from the sugar plantations of Haiti to the tents of Zuccotti Park. Our syllabus will range across the humanities, embracing, to cite a few examples, the writings of Karl Marx, the films of George Romero, and the genre of the Zombie Survival Guide. Registration restricted to CCAS freshman.

AMST 1000.11 – Representing Black Men
Calvin Warren
TR, 3:45–5:00
Black men are complicated, if not paradoxical, figures in American society. On the one hand, black men are hyper-visible in media/popular culture, as fetish objects of consumption and fantasy; on the other hand, black men are invisible as subjects—their political concerns (e.g. high mortality rates and joblessness) are often underrepresented, disregarded, or unpublicized. This course examines the historical and cultural representation of black men in American society. The following questions will orient the course: What social, cultural, and historical formations sustain the ‘paradox of representation’ (hyper-visibility/invisibility)? What strategies have black men used to challenge these formations? Have representations of high-profile figures like President Obama opened up new representational possibilities for black men or entrenched stereotypical representations? We will grapple with these questions using photography, film, literature, autobiography, and historical documents. Registration restricted to CCAS freshman.

AMST 1000.12 – Black Culture in the Nation’s Capital
James Miller
T, 12:45-3:15
Although the ‘Harlem Renaissance’ has become firmly established as the lens through which many Americans have come to view the first major flowering of African American culture in the 20th century, this perspective overlooks the centrality of Washington, D.C. as an important site of African American life and culture. This seminar explores depictions of 20th century black life and culture through a close examination of works by Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Sterling Brown; the contemporary fiction of George Pelecanos and Edward P. Jones; as well as music, film, and field trips. The seminar will conclude with consideration of the ‘renaissance’ presently occurring in different sections of the District. Registration restricted to CCAS freshman.
AMST 1000.13 – Museums and the Politics of Representation
Teresa Murphy
W, 12:45-3:15
Washington is a city where everything has a political meaning – including culture. The Smithsonian Museum, with its vast array of artistic, anthropological, and historical collections, is funded by Congress. As a result, politicians weigh in on exhibits and are not shy about demanding changes. Donors, who often pay to stage an exhibit, are equally intrusive. This course will examine how big money and politics can shape the way our nation’s heritage is displayed here in Washington. Students will visit the museums, meet with curators, and research the rich archival sources that reveal the lively history of cultural display in the nation’s capital. Registration restricted to CCAS freshman.

AMST 2011.80 – Modern American Cultural History
Kip Kosek
TR, 9:35-10:25
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 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 significance 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.

AMST 2125.80 – Varieties of Feminist Theory
Cynthia Deitch
MW, 2:20-3:35
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, sex positive feminism, black feminism, 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 2320.80 – US Media and Cultural History
Laura Kenna
TR, 2:20-3:10
This course will examine mass culture – film, radio, television, internet – and its role in US history from the turn of the 20th century to the present. Focusing on media production, consumption, and reception, this course will consider the historical contexts in which media emerged and developed. The cultural texts range from silent films to post-WWII sitcoms and contemporary new media. Students will learn to consider media histories in light of theoretical debates about ideology, media effects, national identity, ethnic and racial identity, gender roles, and imperialism. In addition to other course requirements, student work includes a research paper in which students analyze a media artifact in its historical and cultural context. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.
AMST 2410.80 – 20th Century US Immigration
Thomas Guglielmo
TR, 2:20-3:10
This class will investigate immigration patterns, immigration policy, and immigrants’ lives in the United States from the turn of the twentieth century to the present. Which immigrant groups have come to the United States? When and why have they come? And what have their lives been like once they got here? How has the federal government, and Americans more generally, responded to immigrants and immigration? Why have we welcomed some newcomers as good future Americans and scorned others as “forever foreigners” or “illegal aliens”? The course will explore these questions through a mix of reading, writing, lecture, and discussion. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

AMST 2490.80 – Disability in American History
Katie Brian
MW, 9:35-10:25
This course will examine patterns of response to human variation throughout U.S. history. We will draw upon intellectual, cultural, and social histories to deepen our understanding of the ways in which disability has been imagined and lived over the past two centuries. As we move through the semester, some of our central questions will be: how and why have perceptions of disability and ability changed over time? How have these changes affected the lived reality of physical and psychological difference? How have professional, official, and popular understandings of disability been formed in, through, and against cultural products? How might the inclusion of disability change what we know of U.S. history? To explore these and other issues, we will place scholarly articles alongside primary historical documents such as patient case files, radio broadcasts, cartoons, and popular films. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.

AMST 2490W.10 – The African American Experience
Calvin Warren
TR, 12:45-1:35
From the auction block to the White House, African Americans have played a central role in shaping democracy and national culture. This course will provide a survey of the historical, political, and cultural dimensions of the African American experience in the U.S. The course will be organized chronologically and thematically and will cover topics such as American slavery, medical experimentation, Hurricane Katrina, aesthetics, hip-hop, and Afro-futurism. We will grapple with important ethical, political, and philosophical questions that the African American experience raises. For example, what does it mean to be human? How does race complicate ideas of beauty? We will use multi-disciplinary strategies of reading and interpretation to examine the continuity, and rupture, of historical experiences. The course will use primary historical documents, literature, film, and secondary critical sources to investigate the contours of this experience. This course satisfies a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.

AMST 2490W.80 – Discovering the Mind
Jamie Cohen-Cole
TR, 11:10-12:00
This class is an introduction to the growth and development of psychology since the nineteenth century and role of the mind sciences in shaping modern society, politics and culture. We will examine how the psychological sciences have given us a variety of ways to understand ourselves, other people, and human nature. They have come to help us understand what it means to normal and have shaped the definitions of illness and insanity. Class topics will include phrenology, the birth of experimental psychology, eugenics, personality testing, the SAT, cognitive science,
evolutionary psychology, cognitive neuroscience, the growing use of drugs to treat mental illness, and the use of mind sciences in politics, law, business, and education. This course satisfies a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.

AMST 2521.80 – American Architecture 1865-1941
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 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
Katie Brian
MW, 3:45-5:00
This course is an introduction to the major theories and methods that define the field of American Studies. We will spend our time together interrogating “culture”—the values, symbols, myths, ideas, ways of life, and systems of meaning that shape the selves and worlds around us. Some of our central questions will be: how do we make meaning of cultural objects and cultural formations? How—and by whom—is meaning produced? Do we determine our realities by observing, cognizing, and feeling, or do cultural objects shape and determine our realities for us? Registration restricted to American Studies majors only.

AMST 3901.10 – Examining America
Suleiman Osman
MW, 11:10-12:25
This course offers students an introduction to the history, debates, and methodologies that are central to the field of American Studies. Students will analyze key texts in American Studies
AMST 3950.10 – American Fictions
James Miller
R, 3:30-6:00
“What then is the American, this new man?” asked J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur in Letters From an American Former (1782). “Who will tell America’s story?” asked the novelist Russell Banks more than two hundred years later. These questions will bracket and inform our close examination of stories told by major American writers, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, ranging from Herman Melville to E.L. Doctorow. Other writers include Edith Wharton, Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, Richard Wright, and Philip Roth.

AMST 3950.12 – Drug Use in America after 1945
Emily Dufton
TR, 9:35-10:50
Drug use has long been a part of American culture, a subject that is both titillating and taboo, while anti-drug activism, from Prohibition to Just Say No, has lurked behind it, trying to change Americans' ways. This class will explore the changing drug landscape in the post-war era, from the "conformist culture" of alcohol in the 1940s and '50s, to our current moment of prescription drug abuse and "Breaking Bad," as well as the myriad forms of anti-drug activism that have accompanied these changing trends. We will look at cultural representations of drugs, drug users, and anti-drug activists in films, television shows, novels, autobiographies, music, and museum exhibitions in order to explore how drug use can deepen our understanding of American history and American culture. A heavy emphasis will be placed on reading, writing and discussion. Group screenings of films may be scheduled during the evenings.

AMST 3950.80 – American Art in the Era of National Expansionism
David Bjelajac
TR, 3:45-5:00
This course explores American art from the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 to the Spanish-American War and the building of the Panama Canal at the end of the Gilded Age and beginning of the Progressive Era in the United States. Issues of national identity, republican ideology, capitalist enterprise, institutional slavery and racial segregation as well as working class and women's rights will be discussed in relation to paintings, sculptures, prints and architectural spaces. Special attention will be given to Antebellum American conflict between North and South and the academic, museum and market expansion of the arts during the Civil War and its aftermath ending with the aesthetic and political radicalism of the arts during the early-20th century advent of Modernism.

AMST 3950.81 – The Ghetto: History of a Concept
Daniel Schwartz
T, 11:10-1:00
AMST 3950.82 – American Slavery and Its Legacies
Erin Chapman
R, 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, Hartman's Lose Your Mother, and McElyea’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.10 – Madness and Psychiatry in America
Katie Brian
T, 3:30-6:00
This course will examine some of the ways in which Americans have understood and responded to psychological variation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will begin with the “discovery” of the insane asylum in the 1830s and progress forward to the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As we move through this history, we will ask three primary questions: How have medical professionals perceived and responded to mental difference in their midst? How has the state been complicit in these responses? How have those deemed mentally different experienced these responses and what strategies have they developed to counter them? The class focuses on six distinct periods: the advent of asylum medicine and the professionalization of American psychiatry; the patient protest movement of the mid-nineteenth century; the eugenics movement; the role of war in psychiatric learning; the anti-psychiatry movement; and the post-institutional world. This course will satisfy a WID requirement.

AMST 3950W.11 - Sexuality and Embodiment in Early American Literary Culture
Scott Larson
F, 12:45-3:15
How did sex shape early American literature? From “virgin” accounts of colonial discovery, through the “sex panic” of the 1790s, to the romantic friendships and sexual utopianism of the early nineteenth century, American literary culture has been organized around sexual control on one hand and sexualized fantasies on the other. This course asks how sex shaped bodies of literature and how literature formed American bodies. We will also be considering “American” Literature broadly, understanding the emergence of American literary culture as a product of global networks that moved ideas, goods, beliefs, and people across national and geographical boundaries. We will read a broad array of texts, including Charles Brockden Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Walt Whitman, and the Oneida Community. We will pair literary readings with secondary texts that place the literature in historical, political, and cultural context. The course understands sexuality broadly, as part of larger questions of embodiment and social structure. We will therefore ask how sexuality is part of emerging racial formations; changing beliefs about gender; conflict over democracy and political power; challenges of imperial conquest and global trade; and debates about reason, religion, science, and secularism. This course will require students to develop a research project, write and revise a seminar paper presenting an original argument based on research, and present the research project to the class. Students will practice archival research skills, and we will work with research librarians to address the particular challenge of researching gender and sexuality in archives that often obscure or destroy evidence of non-normative sexualities and gender presentations. This course satisfies a WID requirement.

AMST 3950W.81 – US Black Feminism 1830-1990
Erin Chapman
F, 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 satisfies a WID requirement.

AMST 5771W.80 – Epidemics in American History
Vanessa Gamble
MW, 12:45-2:00
This course surveys the history of epidemics in the United States from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. It examines the development of the medical and public health responses to epidemics and the social, political, cultural and economic impact of epidemics on American history and culture. This semester the course will focus on tuberculosis, the 1918 influenza epidemic, polio, and HIV/AIDS. We will use primary documents, historical accounts, memoirs, fiction, and films to understand the history of these four diseases. This course satisfies a WID requirement.
AMST 6190.11 – The Temporalities of Capital
Dara Orenstein
M, 12:00-1:50
This readings-intensive seminar takes stock of the adage that “time is money,” the notion that the quality of temporality – how we inhabit, perceive, and regulate time – is conditioned in no small measure by the rate and rhythm of global capitalism. After selections from Marx’s Capital, we will turn to specific studies of capitalist modernity, focusing on the United States, and looking at the history of temporality on multiple scales, from the everyday to the planetary, in sites such as the futures market, the laboratory, the office, and the orchard. Along the way we will engage with the work of Giovanni Arrighi, Lauren Berlant, Susan Buck-Morss, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Silvia Federici, David Harvey, Fredric Jameson, Peter Osborne, Moishe Postone, and William Sewell, among others. We will also think about the concept of history itself, and about why it is that in moments of revolution, as Walter Benjamin notes, people shoot out the clocks and rewrite the calendars. Registration restricted to graduate students only.

AMST 6190.12 – The United States and the World
Melani McAlister
T, 1:00-3:30
This seminar will examine the history of US involvements on the world stage from the late 19th to 21st centuries, looking at politics, culture and religion. We will consider US foreign policy and the politics of race; the transnational flow of cultures and people; the significance of religious identities that both defend and transcend national borders, and the role of the state, capital, and NGOs in various forms of governance and power. We will work with a number of case studies, using secondary historical scholarship, primary sources (including film, novels, and documents), and theoretical readings (on governance, affect, gender, etc.). Registration restricted to graduate students only.

AMST 6195.10 – Cold War American Culture
Jamie Cohen-Cole
T, 4:10-6:00
This is a research seminar in which students will write original research papers on Cold War America. Students will undertake independent research on this topic using historical research to examine the culture, society, and politics of the period. Students might write papers that examine the ways in which geopolitics intersected with aspects American life. Questions that might be considered include: what forms did anti-communism take and how did they affect American society? How did American society, culture, and politics develop because of technical developments related to the cold war including nuclear arms, the computer, airplanes, survey research, and even new conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, rationality, and modernity? Students may rely on sources ranging from archival to print or visual media and material culture. We will begin by reading exemplary articles. Students will then engage in individual research projects of their own choosing that are based in primary sources and address important scholarly issues related to Cold War American culture. Registration restricted to graduate students only.
AMST 6195.11 – The US State  
Tom Guglielmo  
R, 11:10-1:00  
This is a graduate research seminar about the American state. The central course goal is for each student to produce a primary-source research paper on some aspect of this broad topic that, with slight revision, can be—and will be—submitted to a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal for publication. Toward this end, students will work collaboratively and deliberately—moving from central questions and reviews of relevant literature to formal proposals and preliminary and final drafts. Registration restricted to graduate students only.

AMST 6430.80 – Gender, Sexuality, and American Culture I  
Terry Murphy  
F, 10:00-11:50  
This seminar focuses on how power was deployed in early America, from colonial settlement through the end of Reconstruction. The central premise of the course is that shifting ideologies of gender and sexuality were deeply tied to political change, the formation of racial ideologies, and imperial conquest. Through readings, we will examine how ideas of gender and sexuality were central to the organization of colonial contact and how those ideas varied in the English, French, and Spanish empires. We will explore debates about the relationship of gender and sexuality to the creation of race in the colonial world. We will analyze how challenges to patriarchy were related to the political revolutions that swept the western world in the 18th century. We will explore how alternatives to dominant ideals of sexual identity were expressed and how those alternatives challenged or were accepted by mainstream society. We will discuss how gender and sexuality were symbolically figured in the urban, industrial, and market transformations of the nineteenth century. And finally, we will explore how ideas of citizenship were intertwined with ideas of gender and sexuality. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6470.80 – Cityscapes  
Suleiman Osman  
W, 2:10-4:00  
What is the “city”? How have writers, reformers, theorists, planners and everyday residents analyzed, represented and inhabited the modern metropolis? Students will read scholarship on the social and cultural history of American cities in a global context, as well as theoretical works by authors such as Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Doreen Massey and David Harvey. 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 offers an analysis of economic techniques used to implement historic preservation projects and of the costs and benefits of preserving both historic buildings and districts. The roles of public agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and other private-sector contingents are examined as are the tools used to promote historic preservation. Among the objectives of the course is to develop an understanding of revitalization and preservation economic strategies and how they can be used to affect the real estate development process; to examine current economic tools used to advance historic preservation; and to allow students to conduct individual research in an aspect of the economics of preservation. Registration restricted to graduate students.

**AMST 6730.80 – Folklore and Popular Culture**
James Deutsch
M, 6:10–8:00
This graduate-level seminar will explore the intersections between folklore and popular culture in the United States, ranging from outsider art and urban legends to graphic novels and motion pictures. Student presentations and discussions will cover a range of artistic expressions that incorporate both traditional and commercial forms of American culture, as well as theoretical perspectives from the second half of the nineteenth century to contemporary times. In addition to active participation in class discussions, students will write a seminar paper (20-25 pages) on a particular aspect of folklore and popular culture. The specific topic will be selected in consultation with the instructor. This course is taught at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, 600 Maryland Avenue SW, Suite 2001. Registration restricted to graduate students.