American Studies Course Descriptions
SPRING 2016

Revised: 11/10/15

Note: Check the GW Schedule of Classes website for class locations and the most up-to-date information at http://my.gwu.edu/mod/pws/

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

AMST 1000.11 – Race & Racism in US History
Thomas Guglielmo
F, 12:45-3:15
CRN: 77161
This class will examine the history of race and racism in the United States from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day. Through a mixture of reading, writing, lecture, in-class discussion, film viewings, and trips around DC, we’ll explore the evolving social boundaries of race and their significance in shaping our lives, livelihoods, thoughts, and dreams. Class topics will include Jim Crow and mass incarceration, colonialism and immigration, Chinese exclusion and Japanese-American internment, civil rights and Black Lives Matter.

AMST 2011.80 – Modern American Cultural History
Joseph Kip Kosek
TR, 9:35-10:25
CRN: 76124
This course examines the history of the United States from the Civil War 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. Key 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 consequences 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 register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

AMST 2120W.80 – Freedom in American Thought and Popular Culture
Elisabeth Anker
WF, 11:10-12:00
CRN: 77268
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 2380.80 – Sexuality in U.S. History**
Chad Heap
MW, 3:45-4:35
CRN: 77067
This course examines the changing social organization and cultural meaning of sexual practices and desires in the US. Topics include the establishment of sexual norms in colonial America; the relationship between sex and slavery; the contested boundaries drawn between same-sex sociability and eroticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the relatively recent emergence of heterosexuality and homosexuality as predominant categories of sexual experience and identity; and the development of women's liberation and lesbian, gay, queer and transgender politics. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

**AMST 2410.80 – 20th Century U.S. Immigration**
Thomas Guglielmo
TR, 2:20-3:10
CRN: 74580
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.

**AMST 2440.80 – The American City**
Suleiman Osman
TR, 11:10-12:00
CRN: 75476
This introduces students to the exciting field of urban studies. Students will explore the political, architectural and cultural history of American cities, with a particular focus on Washington DC. Students will tackle urban planning and policy debates about topics such as urban renewal, sprawl, policing, public housing, immigration and gentrification. The course will include works by a range of urban writers such as Jane Jacobs, Mike Davis, Neil Smith, Malcolm X and clips from the TV show “The Wire.” 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
CRN: 73440
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 justice and violence? 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.

**AMST 2521.80 – American Architecture II**  
Richard Longstreth  
MW, 12:45-2:00  
CRN: 73445  
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 3352.80 – Women in the United States to 1865**  
Scott Larson  
TR, 9:35-10:50  
CRN: 77981  
This course will examine the history of women in the Americas and in the United States from trans-Atlantic encounters through the Civil War. We will pay particular attention to the ways in which gender relates to structures of power; the ways in which issues of race, class, sexuality, and ability have shaped ideas about women and femininity; and the ways that women made American social, political, and cultural history. We will investigate the historical construction of womanhood itself in early America, asking how ideas about gender and sexuality changed over time and how people worked to shape and to challenge gender norms.

**AMST 3901.10 – Examining America**  
Elaine Peña  
MW, 12:45-2:00  
CRN: 73451  
This course invites students to examine America using international, transnational, and cross-border processes as optics. A wide array of itineraries, exchanges, networks, and social movements has shaped America and created dynamic variations of the American experience. Using key works in American Studies, this course shows that the United States is deeply invested in maintaining those long-standing strategies of social reproduction and economic development. But does the cross-border flow of capital, people, ideas, and values weaken or strengthen national character? Do those processes make the category of “nation” obsolete? Do
they change the way we think about American racial politics, American citizenship, or what constitutes American religion? We will consider those questions using a variety of interpretive tools. We will also place those discussions within the broader field of American Studies, particularly the history of the discipline, to understand how scholarly debates have changed over time.

**AMST 3950.10- Religion & America in US Film**  
Jason Stevens  
M, 3:30-6:00  
CRN:74588  
Since the age of silent movies, religion has proven a popular, profitable, and still controversial subject in American cinema. This course will introduce students to the topic by combing narrative analysis, film history, and religious study. Questions may include:  
1. How have filmmakers adapted Hollywood genres in order to promote belief?  
2. How have commercial representations of holy figures, stories, and miracles altered people’s sense of the boundaries between the sacred and the profane?  
3. How has censorship shaped the content of films dealing with faith?  
4. In what ways have films shaped Americans’ perceptions of religious nationalism, millennialism, race, and empire?

**AMST 3950.11 – New York City: An Environmental History**  
Patrick Nugent  
W, 3:30-6:00  
CRN: 77300  
This course will historicize the ecological, social, and political landscape of the New York City. Developing an environmental history of the region, the class will trace the development of metropolitan parks, landfills, water systems, transportation infrastructure, zoning codes, and residential communities. It will also engage a number of fields and approaches helpful in engaging debates surrounding the “natural world”—including environmental justice and history of science. The course will encourage students to historicize a specific urban landscape of their choosing—say a park, pier, or highway. After collectively accumulating a series of assignments—from traditional papers and presentations to audio recordings and digital maps—the class will by the end of the semester produce an environmental walking tour of the city available to an online public.

**AMST 3950.80 – The Culture of Civil Rights**  
Ashley Brown  
WF, 2:20-3:35  
CRN: 74587  
This advanced seminar will examine the cultural history of African American political resistance from the early to middle twentieth century. We will study the various art forms that people of African descent have employed to assert their humanity, preserve their identity, and critique oppression of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Fiction, poetry, film, music, theater, memoir, aesthetics, and athletics are among the creative devices that we will explore. We will mine the complex cultures of the seminal places and organizations recognized as having played crucial roles in the long black freedom struggle. We will also probe the political contributions and legacies of leading African American cultural figures.

**AMST 3950W.80 – Epidemics in American History**  
Vanessa Northington Gamble  
MW, 12:45-2:00  
CRN: 75494  
This course surveys the history of epidemics in the United States from the late nineteenth century to today. 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, and films to understand the history of these four diseases.

AMST 3950.81- American Slavery and Its Legacies
Erin Chapman
R, 11:10-1:00
CRN: 77115
In this seminar 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 first consider slavery’s relationship to the ideal of American democracy and the history of slavery as a bedrock institution of U.S. society. We will read books such as Johnson’s Soul by Soul, Roediger’s The Wages of Whiteness, Hartman’s Lose Your Mother, and McElya’s Clinging to Mammy. As we do so, we will consider slavery as a foundational institution within U.S. society and culture and interrogate the widespread influence of notions of race, hierarchy, and social mobility established through slavery that continue to operate in American society. As we conclude, we will take up the question of current claims of “post-race” politics and “post-black” identities and their implications for the ongoing problem of race in the United States.

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AMST 6190.10 – Advanced Workshop in American Studies
Melani McAlister
M, 2:00-3:30
CRN: 77301

AMST 6190.11 – Pessimism and Negativity
Calvin Warren
R, 2:00-3:50
CRN: 73950
This course will examine the recent “pessimistic turn” in cultural theory. We will read texts that present pessimistic and negative thematics (e.g. Queer Negativity and Afro-pessimism) and critiques of such positions. In particular, we will wrestle with the cultural imperative to “be happy,” the problem/solution paradigm undergirding theories of the good life, the productive uses of failure/foreclosure, and the reconfiguration of categories such as “life,” “death,” and “humanity.” This course will give priority to theoretical/philosophical perspectives and will include work by Giorgio Agamben, Lee Edelman, Frank Wilderson, Jared Sexton, Jose Esteban Munoz, Judith Halberstam, and David Marriott, among others.

AMST 6190.12 – Preservation and Sustainability
Richard Wagner
R, 4:10-6:00
CRN: 74706
This course will provide an understanding of the relationships between historic preservation and the cultural, social and economic dimensions of sustainability with specific reference to how current and future policies affect both sustainability and preservation. It will consist of assigned readings and in-class discussions. Each student will be expected to develop and
present a paper on a topic related to historic preservation.

**AMST 6190.80 – Freedom and Domination**  
Elisabeth Anker  
W, 2:00-3:50  
CRN: 76106  
Freedom is one of the most contested of political terms, and is taken to mean everything from individual self-mastery, to the free market, to the radical emancipatory overthrow of domination. This course will examine these varied discourses of freedom, with specific focus on how the promise of freedom often justifies war, domination, slavery, and oppression. Contrary to many schools of thought that locate freedom in sovereignty and free choice, we will examine how pursuits of free choice and sovereignty often exacerbate rather than overcome horrific conditions of unfreedom. We will first examine some of the most important theoretical and historical texts on freedom, and then focus on three areas of political concern: economic inequality, in which freedom is used to legitimate the market economy; racism, in which freedom has been used to justify slavery and racialized oppression; and the ecology of the anthropocene, in which freedom has been used to legitimate unsustainable patterns of development. Yet throughout the class we will also examine concepts and practices of freedom that support emancipatory, world-making, and transformative action that aim to challenge inequality, racism, and climate change.

**AMST 6195.10 – Identity and Embodiment**  
Chad Heap  
W, 10:00-11:50  
CRN: 72785  
This graduate research seminar takes as its subject the role of identity and the body—whether sexualized, racialized, gendered, politicized, modified, commodified, sanctified, etc.—in American culture. We will focus on individual research and writing, as well as on reading and commenting on each other’s work. Each student will produce an original, article-length (7,000-10,000 words), primary-source-based, scholarly research essay with the goal of ultimately submitting it for publication in an academic journal. 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.

**AMST 6195.11 – Performance and Place**  
Elaine Peña  
M, 5:10-7:00  
CRN: 73453  
This graduate research seminar uses a combination of ethnographic, place, and performance-oriented methods to analyze the backstage logistics of cultural production. Additionally, participants will spend the semester honing in on the political economic dimensions of their objects of study (e.g. acts, texts, artifacts, ideas, images, encounters, etc.). We will spend class time discussing how to craft research questions, conduct literature reviews, identify sources, and acquire evidence. The goal of this course is to produce a 20-page research paper. Students will have the opportunity to workshop paper drafts in class.

**AMST 6470.80 – Cityscapes**  
Suleiman Osman  
T, 2:00-3:50  
CRN: 77121  
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, as well as theoretical works by authors such as Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Doreen Massey and David
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.

As seen in diverse media and contexts, artists of the United States have represented numerous mythic, religious figures from Greco-Roman, Egyptian and Judeo-Christian antiquity to construct a consensual nationalist identity from an extremely violent, conflicted history of socio-economic exploitation, territorial expropriation, racism, anti-immigrant nativism, gender inequality and sexual repression. Nevertheless, by the early 20th century, as the United States became a Pacific power, architectural sculptures of Confucius and the Prophet Muhammad also began to celebrate American imperialism's civilizing mission. Beyond this investigation of nationalist, imperial icons, the seminar examines the interrelationships of labor, nature and the metaphysics of God's divine architecture. As an analogue of God's creation, imaginative reconstructions of Solomon's Temple variously engaged Jews, Christians, Newtonian deists, Freemasons and Mormons. More broadly, we shall investigate how the materials and practices of artisans and artists constituted an alchemical, hermetic search for the philosopher's stone or that secret substance/formula capable of perfecting the earthly, global microcosm in harmony with the heavenly macrocosm. The winged Greek/Roman god Hermes/Mercury, the secretive, androgynous god of both merchants and thieves, guided travelers, escorted souls and employed eloquence to healingly reconcile matter with the divine logos. Hermes/Mercury closely identified with the Egyptian god Thoth, or the alchemist-magus Hermes Trismegistus (thrice-great), a legendary figure who personified an ancient literature and visual culture of occult wisdom that shaped the material, spiritual lives of diverse religious communities, fraternities and learned groups from the colonial era to the present. Advances in telecommunications, evolutionary social sciences and nuclear physics encouraged spiritualist communications with angels and the deceased. At the same time, white, Anglo-
Saxon Protestant theories of racial, ethnic superiority fostered other-worldly aestheticism among Gilded Age robber barons turned art collectors/connoisseurs.