

American Studies Course Descriptions Spring 2017

Revised: 10/31/16

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 – Dean’s Seminar: Zombie Capitalism

Dara Orenstein

T, 3:30-6

CRN: 55606

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

AMST 2011.80 – Modern American Cultural History

Joseph Kosek

TR, 9:35-10:25

CRN: 54897

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

MW, 11:10-12:00

CRN: 55685

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: 55522

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 2440.80 – The American City

Suleiman Osman

TR, 12:45-1:35

CRN: 54481

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 2490.10 – The Politics of "Saving Africa"

Melani McAlister

WF, 12:45-2:00

CRN: 57034

This seminar will examine how people in the United States have represented Africa, as well as how Africans responded to those representations. Often, images in the US showed Africa and Africans as abject and in need of rescue, or as dangerous and savage. We will analyze the content of those images and their effect on US-African relations. We will also explore how, in some cases, Americans engaged African people in relationships of solidarity.

The course will begin with a history of European imperial images of Africa, including the images that accompanied the slave trade. The majority of the semester will focus on US images produced after 1960. Drawing on a few case studies, we will examine cultural representations, including movies and travel narratives, as well as media reporting. We will see how Africa was understood by US policymakers who were positioning the US as a global power both during and after the Cold War. And we will study the work of social movements both in the US and Africa. Our case studies will include the views of African Americans toward pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s; American and European responses to the Nigerian civil war

in the late 1960s (when Doctors without Borders was founded); the anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s; and US support for the founding of South Sudan in the 2000s. This course will be reading intensive and will require original research for a substantive final paper.

AMST 2490.80 – Trans American Histories

Scott Larson

WF, 2:20-3:35

CRN: 57036

In 2014, Time Magazine announced “The Transgender Tipping Point” as the “next civil rights frontier.” Even as transgender celebrities including Caitlyn Jenner and Laverne Cox have drawn national audiences, bathrooms have become battlegrounds for gender justice, and trans people have been targeted by hate crimes and state violence. While trans rights may appear to be a relatively new phenomenon, even a “frontier,” transgender and gender non-conforming people and communities have a long history in the United States.

This course seeks to explore contemporary transgender movements, politics, and identities in historical context. We will look at trans pasts to analyze how contemporary understandings of gender systems and identities are historically constructed, and we will use our historical work to think critically about trans futures. Throughout the course, we will be particularly attentive to the ways that race, class, citizenship, and ability are woven into and constitutive of gender and gender variance.

AMST 2490.81 – Religion and Sexuality

Scott Larson

TR, 2:20-3:35

CRN: 57035

In contemporary US culture, "religion" and "sexuality" are often imagined to be opposing forces, or to be locked in struggles over freedom and morality. This course will examine the ways that religion and sexuality intersect and even shape what "counts" as religion and as sexuality. We employ a range of theoretical, historical, and anthropological approaches to explore religion, sexuality, and secularity, and we will engage a wide range of religious practices and traditions, as well as different sexual practices, identities and gender expressions. We will engage contemporary debates over religious freedom, and question the relationship between secularity and sexual liberation, both by engaging ways that religious movements have worked for gender and sexual freedoms and ways that secularization has failed to bring about liberation for women and sexual minorities. To ground these contemporary debates, we will investigate historical religious movements that used ideas about sexuality and sexual reform to found or revitalize religious movements, from 18th century revivalism to 19th century utopianism and moral reform; from debates over Native American dance traditions to the rise of the 20th century religious right and contemporary global questions of laws banning head scarves in France, “pinkwashing” Israel, sexuality and the rise of Hindu nationalism, and Islamophobia in the gay alt-right.

AMST 2490.82 – Discovering the Mind

Jamie Cohen- Cole

MWF, 11:10-12

CRN: 58113

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 be normal and have shaped the definitions of illness and insanity. Class topics will include phrenology, experimental psychology, eugenics, intelligence testing, 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.

AMST 2490W.10 – Violence in American Culture

Calvin Warren
TR, 12:45-1:35
CRN: 53016

Why is our culture obsessed with serial killers, horror films, street fights, YouTube clips of brutality, and homicidal video games? What does violence provide for our culture. Is it possible to live without it? This course will provide an overview of contemporary theoretical approaches to violence and American culture. In particular, we will interrogate the relationship between violence and identity, subjection and Ethics, knowledge and violence, and pleasure and terror. The course will consider the theoretical difficulties of studying violence: how do we isolate it as a conceptual object? Is there anything outside of violence, or is the world itself violence? We will examine concepts such as terror, “slow death,” horror, pain, terror, torture, necropolitics, and systemic forms of violence such as slavery, genocide, colonialism, and imprisonment. In particular, we will use theoretical frameworks to analyze instances of violence in American Culture and “violent products” that bring tremendous pleasure. Readings will include theoretical texts by Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, Saidiya Hartman, Lauren Berlant, Elaine Scarry, Frank Wilderson, Adriana Cavarero, Achille Mbembe, among others.

AMST 2521.80 – American Architecture II

Richard Longstreth
MW, 2:20-3:35
CRN: 53019

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 3151.80 – American Art in the Age of Revolution

David Bjelajac
TR, 12:45-2:00
CRN: 57042

This course explores American art during the 18th century “consumer revolution,” the American War for Independence, and the early republic. Lectures and readings emphasize the socioeconomic and political purposes of art with a focus on the visual culture of the Enlightenment and Second Great Awakening. Issues of national identity, republican ideology, capitalist enterprise and institutional slavery will be discussed in relation to paintings, sculptures, prints and architectural spaces. A civil war, the American Revolution sowed the seeds for the Civil War of 1861-65.

AMST 3352W.80 – Women in the United States to 1865

Scott Larson
WF, 9:35-10:50
CRN: 57044

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 3900.10 – Critiquing Culture

Dara Orenstein
TR, 12:45-2:00
CRN:57050

This seminar introduces students to major methods for understanding and interpreting cultural materials. We will explore how and why culture—particularly mass culture such as film, television, photography, music, fashion, and advertising—plays such a significant role in our lives. At various point in the semester, we will examine 1) the ways that we experience culture and ground our identities in it; 2) the ideological messages and stereotypes that circulate in cultural products; 3) the institutional, corporate and individual production of cultural products and spaces; and 4) the ways that different audiences interpret the culture they consume. This course is reading intensive and discussion-oriented. Registration restricted to American Studies majors; minors admitted with permission of instructor.

AMST 3950.11 – Black Sexualities

Calvin Warren
TR, 3:45-5:00
CRN: 55714

Popular culture needs black sexuality. Understanding this necessity in our global imaginary will preoccupy our course. We will analyze the erotic economies, which produce, circulate, and profit from black sexuality. How do black bodies structure cinematic, haptic, or psychic desire? What forms of erotic labor are black bodies required to perform pornographically, morally, or politically? Does a phenomenon such as “down low” provide resources for disrupting heteronormative imperatives or does it reinforce them? We will address these questions, and many more, using cinema, music, photography, fashion, and television shows as our guides. The course will pair theoretical readings on black sexuality with historical and contemporary examples.

AMST 3950.80 – Borders and Boundaries

Elaine Pena
MW, 2:20-3:35
CRN: 57051

This upper-level undergraduate and graduate-level seminar explores borders (the literal edge or limit of a territory) and boundaries (intra-societal differences). The course highlights the U.S.-Mexico border but it also draws our attention to border zones across the globe to help us assess and challenge what is local and particular about border space. Seminar readings draw from cultural anthropology, cultural geography, and performance studies to examine classic tensions among state formation, sovereignty, and nationalism. Using a variety of optics and approaches, assigned readings seek to deepen our understanding of global immigration and accompanying anxieties, various forms of border security, and the impact of transport, customs, and trade on border zones. They also examine the production and reinforcement of social categories—how residents living in an either/or environment strategically recognize and deny cultural forms or call upon intangible heritage to make territorial claims and refine intra-group hierarchies.

AMST 3950.83 – Narrative Medicine in American History

Vanessa Northington Gamble
MW, 12:45-2:00
CRN: 58560

This course will focus on narratives as a mechanism to study the history of American medicine in the twentieth century. It will use various styles of narrative such as historical accounts, memoirs, short stories, essays, and films. These stories will provide a framework to examine several themes in the history of medicine including illness and healing from the patient's perspective, the roles of nurses and physicians, cultural representations of disease, the state of medical knowledge, the impact of race and gender, and societal responses to disease.

GRADUATE COURSES

AMST 6110.10 – Memory and Urban Space

Suleiman Osman
T, 6:10-8:00
CRN: 57053

With memorials, museums, historic districts and tourist sites, cities today are repositories of memory. This interdisciplinary course will introduce students to scholarship on public memory and urban space. How does urban space shape and reflect the way we remember the past? How have the politics of memory and battles over the past shaped cities like Los Angeles, New York, Richmond and Washington DC?

AMST 6190.10 – Democracy and Violence

Elizabeth Anker
W, 5:10-7:00
CRN: 54889

Democracy is one of the most frequently used and least agreed upon terms in political life. Various conceptualizations as equality, public dissent, individual expression, antagonism, a free-market economy, or a mix of all of these ideas, “democracy” has been used to justify many disparate social practices. This course will examine the practice and possibility of democracy, with a focus on the violence that inheres to so many of its forms. Is violence constitutive of democracy? What are the relationships between violence and democracy in various racialized, political, economic, and gendered practices? Topics will include slavery and emancipation, capitalism and neoliberalism, human rights, colonial and decolonial violence, civil disobedience, and various imaginative dreamworlds of democratic possibility.

AMST 6190.11 – Natural, Unnatural, Artificial

Jamie Cohen-Cole

W, 12:10-2:00

CRN: 53426

What is nature and what is natural? What is unnatural? What is artificial? This reading and discussion seminar examines how the answers to these questions are products of specific, historically contingent cultural formations. What we humans experience of the natural, artificial, and unnatural comes filtered by specific personal, cultural, institutional, religious, and political formations that vary in time and place. Even how the line that divides the natural from the artificial varies depending on who draws it and where, how, and when the drawing happens. This class will focus on when and how natural things, society, and human artifacts carry moral and political weight; the relationships among nature, truth, and objectivity; how and why some people but not others have more authority to speak about or fashion nature and its opposites; and the making of spaces, technologies, and institutions that construct the natural and the artificial. We will approach these questions through recent and classic critical studies on nature as artifice. Topics to be considered will include, among others, space, landscape, and environment; climate and the anthropocene; cybernetics, information technology and artificial reality; the biological and social scientific construction of human natures (e.g. by ethnicity, race, sex, gender, and sexuality); and the association of specific socio-political formations (e.g. capitalism, imperialism, or democracy) with the construction of the natural and its others.

AMST 6195.10 –US Cultural History

Joseph Kosek

T, 12:00-1:50

CRN: 52492

This graduate research seminar requires each student to write a scholarly article based on original research in some aspect of United States cultural history. Topics may include, but are not limited to, popular culture, cultural politics, intellectual cultures, consumer culture, or cultures of social movements. The goal is to produce a manuscript of 8,000 to 10,000 words that could be submitted to an academic journal. Class meetings will focus on crafting a topic, doing primary research, assembling bibliographies, formulating arguments, using evidence, editing drafts, and writing clearly.

AMST 6195.11 – US in the World: Cultures and Politics

Melani McAlister

W, 10:00-11:50

CRN: 53026

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 6240.80 – Borders and Boundaries

Elaine Pena

MW, 2:20-3:35

CRN: 57302

This upper-level undergraduate and graduate-level seminar explores borders (the literal edge or limit of a territory) and boundaries (intra-societal differences). The course highlights the U.S.-Mexico border but it also draws our attention to border zones across the globe to help us assess and challenge what is local and particular about border space. Seminar readings draw from

cultural anthropology, cultural geography, and performance studies to examine classic tensions among state formation, sovereignty, and nationalism. Using a variety of optics and approaches, assigned readings seek to deepen our understanding of global immigration and accompanying anxieties, various forms of border security, and the impact of transport, customs, and trade on border zones. They also examine the production and reinforcement of social categories—how residents living in an either/or environment strategically recognize and deny cultural forms or call upon intangible heritage to make territorial claims and refine intra-group hierarchies.

AMST 6496.80 – Historic Preservation: Principles and Methods

Richard Longstreth

MW, 4:10-6:00

CRN: 57605

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 indepth 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.

AMST 6650.10 – Advanced Workshop in American Studies

Jamie Cohen-Cole

M, 12:30-2:00

CRN: 57480

This class is required for first and second year PhD students, but it is designed to bring together American Studies graduate students of all levels (MAs and PhD students who are in coursework and those writing dissertations). Students read and comment on shared work, and to learn about key components of the academic process, from figuring out where to submit a journal article to learning how to conceptualize a dissertation. Every student's written submission or conference paper will have a formal comment from another student, along the lines of what is done at conferences. The faculty member provides written comments on all written submissions. Students are expected to make a commitment to the course for the full year, to participate in all assignments, and to read and be prepared to discuss all of the work presented.

AMST 6730.80 – Art and Politics between Civil Wars

David Bjelajac

T, 3:00-5:30

CRN: 55505

This course covers new scholarship on American art and visual culture from the era of the American Revolution through the Civil War and Reconstruction periods of the nineteenth-century. Issues of race, class and gender will be analyzed in relation to the various ways that Americans imagined their national identity within a global network of capitalist development and expansion.