

# American Studies Course Descriptions Spring 2018

Revised: 11/09/17

**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 1050.10 – Race & Racism**

Tom Guglielmo

TR, 9:35-10:50

CRN: 37331

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, film viewings, and in-class discussion, 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 1200.10 – The Sixties in America**

Suleiman Osman

MW, 12:45-1:35

CRN: 37332

A survey of American society, culture, and politics during the decade of the 1960s. Topics include the civil rights movement, the student movement, the Vietnam War, and the counterculture.

### **AMST 2011.80/81 – Modern American Cultural History**

Kimberly Schisler

MW, 12:45-2:00;

TR, 11:10-12:25

CRN: 38013/38024

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 2071.80 – American Art in the Age of Revolution**

David Bjelajac

TR, 12:45-2:00

CRN: 37337

This is a lecture survey of American art from the colonial period to the postmodern present. Primarily focused upon painting, the course also covers sculpture, architecture, printmaking and photography within the broader visual and material culture of United States history. Art works are analyzed in relation to issues of religion, nationalism, ethnicity, race, class and gender.

### **AMST 2120W.80 – Freedom in American Thought and Popular Culture**

Elisabeth Anker

MW, 11:10-12:00

CRN: 34747

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

WF, 12:45-1:35

CRN: 34647

This course examines the changing social organization and cultural meaning of sexual practices and desires in the US. Topics include the establishment of sexual and gender 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 – 20<sup>th</sup> Century U.S. Immigration**

Tom Guglielmo

TR, 2:20-3:10

CRN: 37341

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 2430.10 – Capitalism and Culture**

Dara Orenstein

TR, 3:45-5:00

CRN: 37719

"If you can't afford the good food or if you can't afford health care or if you don't have a job or if your car is dangerous because you can't get it fixed and you DIE," the comedian Marc Maron wrote in 2013, "you just lost the game—bzzzzz—thanks for playing extreme capitalism." If capitalism is a game, then what are its rules, and how do "you" learn them? Why does Maron imply a distinction between capitalism and "extreme" capitalism? Indeed, what does Maron mean by "capitalism," and how is his definition different from that of Richard Pryor, or Charlie Chaplin? In this discussion-based, reading-intensive lecture course, we will sift through over a century's worth of commentary on capitalism and its impact on the United States, examining an array of artifacts to put flesh on the bones of Maron's "you," and to historicize the grammar of our present. We will treat capitalism as both an economic and a cultural system, a way of life and a structure of feeling, drawing on readings of primary documents from Herman Melville to Milton Friedman, Lorraine Hansberry to June Jordan, Kurt Vonnegut to Kurt Cobain, the Wobblies to the World Bank.

### **AMST 2620.10 – Human Mind and Artificial Intelligence**

Jamie Cohen-Cole

TR, 9:35-10:50

CRN: 38496

Where is the boundary between humans and robots? Is it that humans can bleed and robots can rust? Or is there something more important that gets to what is distinctive about humanity? Is it how we think, our intelligence, or our language? If so, then what happens when computers or robots or robots speak and perform intelligent tasks? Focusing on questions such as these this class looks at the history of computers, robots, and artificial intelligence. In tracking this history we will see how the line between humans and machines has been in constant motion as what we believe, and imagine about machines had affected what we know, imagine, and believe about the human mind. We will examine these themes by reading about computers, robots, and artificial intelligence in history and through the visions of the future given in science fiction stories and movies from Frankenstein to AI and I Robot. Topics covered in this course include Charles Babbage's analytical engine, the Turing Machine, cyberspace, and the origins, development, and criticism of research in artificial intelligence.

### **AMST 2521.80 – American Architecture II**

Richard Longstreth

MW, 9:35-10:25

CRN: 32720

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 3901.10 – Examining America**

Kimberly Schisler

MW, 3:45-5:00

CRN:37350

Modes of power and forms of identification within and across U.S. national borders. Social constructions of the nation; forms of diversity and identity, such as race, gender, and sexuality; and the transnational flow of people, ideas, culture, and religion. Restricted to American Studies majors.

### **AMST 3950.80 – Architecture and Post-WWII Landscape**

Richard Longstreth

TR, 3:45-5:00

CRN: 35618

During the fifteen-year period after World War II, the shape and character of the American landscape experienced profound changes. The highly centralized organization of cities that had dominated growth patterns since the early republic began decisively to shift to more diffuse patterns.

Industrial production became ever more scattered and relied on sophisticated technological processes. Corporate offices likewise were relocating into what were formerly considered rural or quasi-rural sites. Retail activities regrouped along arteries far removed from the city center. Suburban residential development occurred at an accelerated pace and for the first time lay within reach of a major segment of the populace. At the same time, the urban core was experiencing accelerated decay and became subject to massive clearance programs. Central and outlying sections alike were shaped and reshaped by massive highway construction programs. A variety of renewal programs captured the limelight, but few proved effective in reversing the prevalent trend. Design was also experiencing significant changes. Only recently cast as extreme and freakish, avant-garde modernism rose to the fore in architectural training and also in building campaigns for commerce, industry, and education. The United States now led the world in fostering a rich spectrum of approaches to design that made the environment of preceding decades seem markedly dated.

Among other topics explored are the impact of widespread motor vehicle use on the metropolis, the rise of a mass consumer market for goods and housing, fundamental shifts in popular taste, critical views of the city, and the undercurrent of persistence in traditional patterns of settlement.

This year the seminar will focus on the dualities of the boom in outlying areas and the decline of inner-city areas. The growth of the periphery beyond the traditional scope of bedroom communities (suburbs in the nineteenth-century sense) will be explored. No less attention will be given to efforts at urban revitalization through commercial and institutional projects as well as efforts to lure the middle-class in-town and to segregate the poor.

Participants may choose from a wide range of topics concerning architecture, landscape, and urbanism, as well as cultural, economic, social, and technological factors that have an impact on the built environment for their research paper.

### **AMST 3950.81 – Post-Civil Rights Black Literature and Culture**

Gayle Wald

TR, 9:35-10:50

CRN: 37860

Post-civil rights is a term used to describe black American art and performance in the contemporary era, in which struggles over race and racial justice take new forms and respond to new challenges, including the notion that the nation is "post-race." This course examines how black American artists—primarily writers but also fine artists, musicians, and film/TV producers—have defined, critiqued, and engaged with concepts of post-ness in their work. It is also concerned with how a generation born after legal desegregation views the "golden age" of civil rights and Black Power. Featured writers/artists include: Ta-Nehasi Coates, Claudia Rankine, Ava DuVernay, Colson Whitehead, Jesmyn Ward, Chimananda Adichie, Kara Walker, and Solange.

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Michael Horka

WF, 2:20-3:35

CRN: 38142

Scientific models of climate change abound, but how can we understand the relationship between science, politics, power, and ecological crisis? This course utilizes science fiction as a way to model, inhabit, and engage with climate change. Students will examine how science fiction imagines the relationship of climate change at various scales from the microbe to human and nonhuman bodies to the biosphere. Using an interdisciplinary approach, students will consider how ecological changes are interconnected with histories and theories of race, gender, and nature, along with capitalism, colonialism, and biopolitics. Topics will include the relationship between bodies and ecosystems, along with the Anthropocene, dystopia, apocalypse, nonhuman animals, genetic modification, species extinction, contagion, terraforming, and the atmosphere.

### **AMST 4701W.10 - Epidemics in American History**

Vanessa Gamble

MW, 12:45-2:00

CRN: 37656

This course surveys the history of infectious disease 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. We will use primary documents, historical accounts, memoirs, and films to understand the history of epidemic disease.

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## GRADUATE COURSES

### **AMST 6190.10 – Humans, Machines, and their Interface: From Automata to Cyborgs, Cyberculture, and Social Media**

Jamie Cohen-Cole

R, 12:00-2:00

CRN: 34184

It is now commonplace in popular and scholarly discourse to draw metaphors which link humans and their communities, institutions, and forms of governance to the structures of individual machines and the networks works that connect them. By providing a language to describe nature, machines, individuals, and society in common terms, the ideas of cybernetics and computers have been means of conceptual transfer that has enabled a wide range of critical theories in cultural studies including models of the "encoding and decoding" of cultural texts to ideas of post-humanness, classical and neoliberalism, the anthropocene, and object oriented ontology. In so doing, computers and information technologies have facilitated the reimagining and reordering of the individual, the social, the institutional, and the state. So too have the cybernetic and computer sciences been central to the structural evolution of the academic-military-industrial complex and reshaped established a number of disciplines across the humanities, physical, biological, social and human sciences. This course provides an introduction to the human/machine metaphor, to its applications, and of how meanings of the metaphor have varied historically based the specific sub-cultural locations of their origination, application, and interpretation.

### **AMST 6195.10 –Democracy in Chains**

Dara Orenstein

T, 6:30-8:20

CRN: 32275

A single book—Nancy MacLean’s *Democracy in Chains*—anchors this graduate research seminar. In just the five months since its publication in June, Maclean’s intellectual and political biography of the economist James Buchanan has stirred up tremendous controversy, with its arguments and even its author’s integrity debated in tweets, blogs, op-eds, petitions, and talk shows. We will work collaboratively to study the book and the furor surrounding it as a way to grapple both with the specific topics that MacLean investigates—conservatism, libertarianism, regionalism, the New South, the Beltway, the Radical Right, state violence, desegregation, white supremacy, massive resistance, education “reform” and school “choice,” think tanks, the Koch brothers—as well as with the general challenges of academic scholarship, such as how to develop a research question, how to identify and interpret primary sources, how to dialogue with other scholars, and how to distill half-baked hunches into clear, persuasive prose. The seminar will function like a laboratory, in that students will pursue individual projects as spin-offs from our collective case study. These projects will touch on MacLean’s historical concerns, however loosely, and/or will explore the meta-problem of what counts as academic authority in the age of fake news. The goal will

be to produce essays of 7,000-10,000 words, based on original research and intended for submission to journals, and drafts of which we will workshop with each other at the end of the semester. Midway through the semester, we will dialogue with MacLean in person.

### **AMST 6195.11 – Research in American Studies**

Suleiman Osman

W, 6:10-8:00

CRN: 32726

### **AMST 6230.10 – The Politics of Freedom**

Elisabeth Anker

W, 2:00-4:00

CRN: 38199

Each year the course has a different theme, and this year it will be on neoliberalism, a political-economic-social system organized by the politics of freedom...especially the freedom of money over people. We'll ask: what are the cultural practices that have shaped the politics of neoliberalism? This class will examine the history, theory, cultural production and political imaginary of capitalism as and neoliberalism. We will emphasize the gendered and racialized forms of neoliberalism, with a focus on consumption, mass incarceration, work and welfare, the privatization of public life especially in education and politics, transnational capital, global migration, climate change, and self-help literature. The first half of the class will examine central texts for the cultural study of capitalism and neoliberalism. The second half of the class will focus on cutting-edge American Studies scholarship.

### **AMST 6550.80 – Architecture and Post-WWII Landscape**

Richard Longstreth

M, 3:30-6:00

CRN: 37354

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

periphery beyond the traditional scope of bedroom communities (suburbs in the nineteenth-century sense) will be explored. No less attention will be given to efforts at urban revitalization through commercial and institutional projects as well as efforts to lure the middle-class in-town and to segregate the poor. Participants may choose from a wide range of topics concerning architecture, landscape, and urbanism, as well as cultural, economic, social, and technological factors that have an impact on the built environment for their research paper.

### **AMST 6730.80 – Orientalism in American Art**

David Bjelajac

T, 3:30-6:00

CRN: 34639

Four decades ago, Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism* (1978) established a binary analytical paradigm for explaining how academicians and governments in the West constructed cultural "otherness" or subordinating stereotypes of "the Orient." This ideology of western superiority served to justify European and American imperialism in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia as a whole. More recent, revisionist scholarship, has transformed the dualistic model of western Orientalist constructs to comprise a heterogeneous range of cultural, ideological positions that are dependent upon the contingencies of specific historical traditions, geo-political interests and aesthetic, religious practices. Americans from the colonial period onward have defined themselves in relation to the ancient Israelites and the biblical history of the Holy Land. The pyramid decorating the Great Seal of the United States and the obelisks of the Bunker Hill and Washington Monuments suggest national rootedness in ancient Egyptian wisdom. On the other hand, the seminar will also explore Orientalism in terms of political resistance to oppression. African-Americans identified with Hebraic opposition to slavery, but they also later celebrated Egyptian art and architecture in conjunction with civil-rights activism and Ethiopia's victory over Italian colonialism at the Battle of Adowa (1896). The seminar will also consider nineteenth-century feminist sculptors' sympathetic representations of powerful, yet tragic, orientalist heroines such as Cleopatra and Zenobia, the third-century Queen of Palmyra resisting Roman domination of the Middle East. In commissioning history paintings, landscapes and sculptures for the United States Capitol, Supreme Court and other public buildings, politically dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPS) fused the traditional imperial trope of civilization's westward course with Christian and Masonic transnational notions of millennial progress to forge the expansionist ideology of America's Manifest Destiny, which undergirded "open-door" world trade or "dollar diplomacy." The seminar will end by exploring the visual culture of Orientalism in relation to U.S. imperial conquest of the Philippines, the post-World-War-I propaganda campaign against communism, and, finally, the the advent of the Cold War marked by the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In response to the atomic bombings and the wartime internment of Japanese-American citizens, many painters, sculptors and Beat Generation artists campaigned against nuclear weapons. African-American civil rights activists linked their use in Japan to American segregationist policies and to the nation's pervasive domestic racism, which further fueled the Cold War and U.S. imperial ambitions in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.