

American Studies Course Descriptions Fall 2018

Revised: 4/12/18

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 1000.80 – Freemasonry & American Art

David Bjelajac

T, 2:30-5:00

CRN: 22848

During the eighteenth-century, English, Scottish, Irish and continental European stonemasons' medieval guild traditions inspired the modern cultural formation of Freemasonry and competing international networks of Masonic lodges. Freemasonry attracted men from a wide socio-economic spectrum and found support from both radical revolutionaries and counter-revolutionary conservatives. But ever since the Age of Enlightenment and the American and French Revolutions, Freemasonry's secretive lodge meetings, mysterious initiation rituals and esoteric visual symbols have fostered orthodox Christian opposition and anti-Masonic conspiracy theories charging a varying host of purported vices, blasphemies and subversive misdeeds. This course critically examines these conspiracy theories, popularized in a variety of media, while also exploring Freemasonry's racial, gender and class exclusions/divisions. Freemasonry's global networking assisted American imperialism and helped shape the nation's capital. Washington, D.C.'s urban design, historic-revival architecture, monumental sculpture and large-scale history paintings will be subjects for lectures, readings, class discussions and field trips to local museums, libraries, buildings and monuments. The seminar will consider the manner in which George Washington himself came to personify American Freemasonry, becoming a model for later United States presidents who joined the fraternity. Students will read both primary and secondary sources and will be required to write papers critically analyzing visual objects and architectural spaces while also evaluating the literature of Freemasonry, anti-Masonry and secret-society conspiracies.

AMST 1100.10 – Politics and Film

Elizabeth Anker

M, 11:10-12:25 and M, 7:10-9:40

CRN: 24134

This class addresses the relationship between politics and film by examining how American films interpret and challenge political power in America. We pair film analysis with readings in political theory to interrogate the operations of power in political life. Exploring films thematically, first we examine those that shape conventional interpretations of political power in America, including concepts of limited government, popular sovereignty, and liberal individualism. Next, we consider films that challenge these ideas by offering alternate conceptions of how power functions, while addressing questions of ideology, surveillance, domination, and biopolitics. The last section investigates particular genres—melodrama, the western, and film noir—that reshape and rearticulate these themes within American political culture. Throughout, we will focus on how to read the visual language of film and the written texts of political theory. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

AMST 2010.80/81 – Early American Cultural History

Nicole Ivy

TR, 3:45-4:35

CRN: 22718

How people's efforts to make meaning of natural landscapes, built environments, social worlds, and encounters of difference influenced the formation of the United States. We track the development of national ideas about freedom and democracy alongside the evolution of everyday beliefs and practices in order to explore what culture might mean as a category of study-- and what difference the study of culture makes. Same as HIST 2010.

AMST 2071.80 – Introduction to the Arts in America

David Bjelajac

MW, 3:45-5:00

CRN: 25006

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 2320.80 – U.S. Media and Cultural History

Melani McAlister

TR, 11:10-12:00

CRN: 26910

This course will examine mass culture – film, radio, music, television, internet – and its role in US history from the turn of the 20th century to the present. Focusing on cultural production, consumption, and reception, this course will consider the historical contexts in which popular culture has emerged and developed. The cultural texts we will study range from silent films to 1950s sitcoms and twenty-first century 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 final paper in which students analyze a media artifact in its historical and cultural context.

AMST 2385.10 – Sex and Citizenship

Chad Heap

MW, 2:20-3:35

CRN: 26917

This course critically examines the ways that gender and sexuality have shaped Americans' understanding of citizenship since the Second World War. Together we will explore the state's efforts to regulate marriage, reproduction, and obscenity; the emergence of the right to privacy and the privatization of sexuality; the role that gender and sexuality have played in determining who can work for the government, serve in the military, or immigrate to the United States; the cultural representation of women, LGBTQ individuals, and other sexual and gender minorities as second-class citizens; and the efforts of women, LGBTQ groups, and others to claim full equality in American culture and politics.

AMST 2430.10 – Capitalism and Culture

Dara Orenstein
TR, 12:45-2:00
CRN: 26918

“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 2440.80 – The American City

Suleiman Osman
TR, 2:20-3:10
CRN: 26919

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 2630.10 – Discovering the Mind

Jamie Cohen-Cole
MW 11:10-12:25
CRN: 26928

This class is an introduction to the growth and development of mind sciences. 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 the birth of experimental psychology, eugenics, personality testing, the SAT, cognitive science, evolutionary psychology, and the uses of mind sciences in politics, law, business, and education.

AMST 2490.13 – Religious Icons in American Culture & Politics

Julie Chamberlain
WF 11:10-12:25
CRN: 27315

From the earliest encounters to today's mass media landscape, religious figures have played an important role in U.S. history. This course chronicles some of the most important of these icons—from the 17th century “Mohawk Saint” to modern-day “prophets” such as Martin Luther King, Jr. (and even Oprah!)—to tell the tale of American religious history. We'll learn not only about

individual personalities and the historical worlds they evoke, but also how they function as icons—that is, as objects of identification, admiration, skepticism and analysis. We'll distill major tensions in the field, including what has counted as “religion” at different moments in U.S. history. Because of their power, we'll pay particular attention to Christian leaders, while accounting for the substantial challenges posed by religious and irreligious “outsiders”—many of whom became icons in their own right. As we do, we'll foreground the ever-present impact of race, gender and class, as well as the role of media and technology.

AMST 2520.80 – American Architecture I

P. Jacks

MW. 2:20-3:35

CRN: 27457

This course examines selected aspects of the built environment in the United States from the first period of European settlement to the eve of the Civil War. Stylistic properties, functions, common patterns of design, technological developments, and urbanistic 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 multi-faceted nature of colonial building and settlement patterns; the emergence of national expression; the rise of city building and of a commercial core; the growing specificity of building types for commercial, governmental, institutional, and religious functions; the enduring importance of the single-family house; the multi-faceted nature of eclecticism; evolving views of nature and landscape design; and the impact of technology. Detailed examination is made of the contribution made by many celebrated figures in design, including Alexander Jackson Davis, Andrew Jackson Downing, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Robert Mills, Frederick Law Olmsted, William Strickland, and Richard Upjohn. At the same time, attention is given to broad tendencies in design and their effect upon rural and urban landscapes. The impact of peoples from Africa and the Caribbean, the British Isles, France, German states, the Netherlands, and Spain is examined during both the colonial and post-colonial periods. Lectures are profusely illustrated.

AMST 2600.10 – U.S. Popular Music and Culture

Gayle Wald

MW, 12:45-2:00

CRN: 27314

This interdisciplinary American Studies course uses popular music—from spirituals and blues to country music and hip hop—as a lens for thinking critically about identity, culture, and history from the 19th century to the present. Rather than survey the history of U.S. popular music, the course approaches popular music as a form of cultural production and expression that sheds light on U.S. national identity, history, and politics. Popular music, we will find, is not merely a cultural reflection of society, but a key means through which Americans enact and negotiate social opportunities, challenges, and struggles. We will examine popular music from the viewpoint of musicians, the music industry (businesses, labels, promoters), and music's publics (audiences, fans). Coursework involves lots of reading and frequent writing. The culmination of the course includes a “Critical Karaoke”—an oral presentation set to a song.

AMST 2610W.80 – Science, Technology, and Politics in Modern America

Jamie Cohen-Cole

MW, 9:35-10:25

CRN: 26247

This course examines the history of science and technology and their role in political and social life. Among the questions we will consider are: how has society, culture, and politics developed and changed because of technical developments ranging from electricity to the automobile, nuclear weapons, the internet, biotechnology and social sciences from SAT tests to economic modeling? How have struggles over science and technology over issues including evolution, global warming, GMOs, and vaccines shaped our culture? How have citizens and the government resolved conflicts over the truth or uses of science and technology? *This course will satisfy a WID requirement.*

AMST 2730.80W – World War II in History and Memory

Tom Guglielmo

WF, 9:35-10:50

CRN: 25505

This writing-intensive course examines Americans' World War II experiences and how those experiences have been studied, debated, understood, and "remembered"—officially, culturally, and personally. It focuses on six overlapping topics—GIs, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese American internment, African Americans, the Holocaust, and women. *This course will satisfy a WID requirement.*

AMST 3900.10 – Critiquing Culture

Dara Orenstein

TR, 4:45-6:00

CRN: 25507

This course provides an introduction to the major theories and methods that define the field of American studies. In particular, we seek to understand the elusive yet omnipresent world of "culture"—the values, symbols, myths, ideas, ways of life, and systems of meaning that shape our identities and worldviews.

AMST 4500.10 – Citizenship in American Life

Tom Guglielmo

W, 12:45-3:15

CRN: 26930

This is an advanced research seminar for American Studies majors on the meanings of citizenship in American life. Students will spend the semester writing substantial research papers on some aspect of this broad topic.

AMST 4702.80W – Race, Medicine, and Public Health

Vanessa Northington Gamble

MW, 12:45-2:00

CRN: 24280

This course focuses on the role of race and racism in the development of American medicine and public health by examining the experiences of African Americans from slavery to today. It will emphasize the importance of understanding the historical roots of contemporary policy dilemmas such as racial and ethnic inequalities and inequities in health and health care. The course will

challenge students to synthesize materials from several disciplines to gain a broad understanding of the relationship between race, medicine, and public health in the United States. Among the questions that will be addressed are: How have race and racism influenced, and continue to influence, American medicine and public health? What is race? How have concepts of race evolved? What have been some of the historical vulnerabilities of black bodies within the medical system? How has medical thought and practices contributed to the political and social status of African Americans? What are racial inequalities and inequities in health and health care? What is the history of these inequalities and inequities and what factors have contributed to their existence and persistence? How have African Americans, the medical and public health professions, and governmental agencies addressed these inequalities and inequities in health and health care? What have been the experiences of African Americans as patients and health care providers and how have they challenged racism in medicine. This course will satisfy a WID requirement.

GRADUATE COURSES

AMST 6100.10 – Scope and Methods in American Studies

Chad Heap

W, 5:10-7:00

CRN: 22263

This course is an intensive introduction to the history, debates, and methodologies that are central to the field of American Studies. Students will analyze key texts, explore ways to redefine the canon of American Studies scholarship, and begin to formulate ideas for future research. This course is restricted to graduate students in American Studies.

AMST 6190.10 – Cultural Studies: History & Method

Melani McAlister

T, 5:10-7:00

CRN: 24191

This course examines a range of theoretical and methodological tools for the study of culture, from Marxism and semiotics to queer theory and affect studies. The course is designed to teach students about the theoretical debates that led into and out of the classical work of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies in the 1970s and 1980s, showing how Marxism, feminism, and other frameworks helped to shape the field at its founding, then exploring the many directions that “cultural studies” has taken in the decades since. Students will read Stuart Hall, Walter Benjamin, Adorno & Horkheimer, Frederick Jameson, Roland Barthes, and Paul Gilroy, as well as Hazel Carby, E. Patrick Johnson, Donna Haraway, Jennifer Nash, Ramzi Fawaz, Inderpal Grewal, Jaspir Puar, and others.

AMST 6190.12 – National Bodies

Nicole Ivy

M, 5:10-7:00

CRN: 26932

Interdisciplinary exploration of how representations of the physical form shape and are shaped by U.S. cultural, political, social, and economic discourse. Theoretical emphasis on race, gender, sexuality, labor, ability, and class

AMST 6470.80 – Cityscapes

Suleiman Osman

R, 5:10-7:00

CRN: 26934

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, WEB DuBois, Doreen Massey and David Harvey. Registration restricted to graduate students.

AMST 6710.10 – American Material Culture

Katherine Ott

W, 1:30–3:30

CRN: 22000

This class is an introduction to the major theories, issues, and diverse viewpoints and practices in the field of material culture. Material culture refers to the objects and artifacts that populate the tactile and visual environment. Material culture is a form of evidence poorly understood and often dismissed, yet it is the primary component of the sensory world – it is through objects and images that people learn about and integrate themselves into the human community. Material culture carries and creates meaning. Some artifacts, such as the refrigerator, the spinning wheel, and the contraceptive pill, initiate new systems and support cultural transitions. Other objects, such as a wedding ring or a judge's gavel, convey complex symbolic meanings. Still others, such as photographs and clothing, create personal identity. We will study the range of these relationships with material things. Registration restricted to graduate students. The class is taught by a Smithsonian history curator and meets off campus; contact Professor Ott at otk@si.edu for location details.