American Studies Course Descriptions Fall 2019

Revised: 4/9/19

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: Zombie Capitalism
Dara Orenstein
W 12:45-3:15
CRN: 97394
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 1100.10: Politics and Film
Elizabeth Anker
M 11:10-12:25 and M 7:10-9:40
CRN: 93721
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 1200.10: The Sixties in America
Suleiman Osman
TR, 2:20-3:10
CRN: 97006
This course will examine American society, culture, and politics during the dynamic and contentious decade of the 1960s. Students will examine topics such as the civil rights movement, the student movement, the Vietnam War and anti-war movement, black power, the counterculture, feminism, the environmental movement, and the New Right. Students will also examine how the memory of the 1960s continues to shape debates about political activism, foreign policy, and cultural consumption today. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.

AMST 2010.80: Early American Cultural History
Nicole Ivy
MW 2:20-3:10
CRN: 92471
This course explores 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
CRN: 94460
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
MW 12:45-1:35PM
CRN: 95688
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. Reading and viewing requirements are extensive. 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 2385.80: Sex and Citizenship**  
Chad Heap  
TR 12:45-2:00PM  
CRN: TBD  
This course examines the ways that gender and sexuality have shaped American citizenship since the Second World War and requires students to engage with several forms of writing in the field of American studies. 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 development of women’s and LGBT social movements and identity politics; the ways that religious and pop cultural representations of women and sexual and gender minorities have shaped Americans’ understanding of good (and bad) citizens; and the effects of terror, violence, and the prison industrial complex on the full participation of women and members of the LGBT community in American politics and culture.

**AMST 2490.10: National Bodies**  
Nicole Ivy  
MW 4:45-6:00PM  
CRN: 97015  
Who makes up the body politic? How have discussions of citizenship and belonging been mapped onto ideas about biology and difference? To approach these questions, this course explores of how representations of the physical form as well as ideas about what constitutes appropriate bodies are shaped by U.S. cultural, political, social, and economic discourse. Assigned texts will present specific theoretical emphasis on race, gender, sexuality, labor, ability, and class.

**AMST 2490.12: Managing Race & Sexuality**  
Amber Musser  
TR 11:10-12:25PM  
CRN: 96001  
“one of the basic phenomena of the nineteenth century was what might be called power’s hold over life. What I mean is the acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being, that the biological came under state control…the right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die.”  
–Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*  
Taking Michel Foucault’s idea that the management of race and sexuality is how power is exercised in modern life, this course examines the ways in which race and sexuality have been produced and regulated by multiple different entities. Drawing on history, theory, and literature, we will look at contemporary examples of the relationship between different forms of governmentality—both local and international— and racialization and sexuality. What assumptions lie behind our ideas of race? How are bodies managed according to the prevailing logics of racialized sexuality? How does sexuality inform the way that we see bodies as gendered, raced, or able-bodied? In addition to looking at the relationship between sexuality and capitalism, religion, and nation, this course asks how these ideas are embodied in particular raced and gendered ideologies. Students will gain historical context for thinking about the relationship between race, sexuality, and its management in addition to learning how to analyze different formations of racialized sexuality.
**AMST 2730W.80: World War II in History and Memory**  
Tom Guglielmo  
TR 9:35-10:25AM  
CRN: 97017  
This course examines Americans' World War II experiences and how those experiences have been studied, debated, understood, and “remembered”—officially, culturally, and personally. Through a mix of reading, writing, and discussion, it focuses on six overlapping topics: GIs, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese American internment, African Americans, the Holocaust, and women.

**AMST 3600.10: Popular Music and Politics**  
Gayle Wald  
MW 9:35-10:25AM  
CRN: 97675  
This interdisciplinary course explores the interactions and intersections of music and politics from the era of abolitionism to the present moment's activism around #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo. We will investigate music as political expression, music in social protest movements, and music as a tool of political organizing. Requirements: open ears, an interest in engaging deeply and widely with both primary and secondary source materials.

**AMST 3900.10 – Critiquing Culture**  
Amber Musser  
T 3:30-6:00  
CRN: 94865  
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 4500W.10: Interrogating GW**  
Tom Guglielmo  
R 12:45-3:15  
CRN: 97397  
This is an advanced research seminar for American Studies majors on the topic of George Washington University. Each student will spend the semester writing a substantial research paper on some aspect of the university -- its student culture or activism; its race, class, or gender politics; its staff; its faculty; its leadership; its donors; its real estate holdings; its relationship with DC or Foggy Bottom; its cultural representation; its labor struggles; its “corporatization,” and so forth. Whatever intellectual interests brought students to American Studies, they will explore these by making GW their principal object of inquiry.

**AMST 4702W.80: Race, Medicine, and Public Health**  
Vanessa Gamble  
MW 12:45-2:00PM  
CRN: 93847  
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.

AMST 6100.10: Scope and Methods in American Studies
Suleiman Osman
R 5:10-7:00PM
CRN: 92073
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: Topics in American Studies
Dara Orenstein
M 5:10-7:00PM
CRN: 93770
If it's the economy, stupid, then what's race got to do with it? How has the accumulation of capital required the reproduction of race, both in and beyond the nation-state? How has racial commodification shaped the value form of capital and the category of the human? What difference has difference made in the expansion of (and resistance to) global capitalism? These and other questions inspire Cedric Robinson’s claim that “the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions.” We will explore Robinson’s theory of “racial capitalism” in this reading-intensive seminar, first in the context of chattel slavery in the United States, and then across an array of more contemporary sites, from the prison industrial complex to domestic labor.

AMST 6431 – Gender, Sexuality, and American Culture II
Chad Heap
T 5:10-7:00PM
CRN: 97033
This graduate seminar explores the usefulness of gender and sexuality as categories of analysis in American culture. Focusing on the period since the Civil War, we will read broadly across the field of sexuality and gender studies in US social and cultural history, performance
studies, ethnography, media and popular culture studies, and critical theory. We will examine the roles that gender and sexuality have played in shaping American culture from the late-nineteenth to the early-twenty-first century; the extent to which modernity and postmodernity gave rise to new categories of sexual and gender identity and experience; and the historically shifting meanings and cultural representations that have marked sexual difference. We will pay particular attention to the intersection of gender and sexuality with race, class, religion, citizenship, and the body; the spatial organization of gender and sexuality in relation to the city, the suburbs, the state, and globalization; and the role that cultural discourses and products—possibly including music, television, film, print media, stage performances, medicine, science, and the law—play in shaping the popular understanding of sexuality and gender and vice versa.