

Course Descriptions – Spring 2019

AMST 1000.10 – Dean’s Seminar: Zombie Capitalism

Dara Orenstein

Monday 12:45-3:15

CRN: 47078

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 1000.12 – Dean’s Seminar: Washington Sex Scandals

Chad Heap

Monday & Wednesday 12:45-2:00

CRN: 48074

The sexual assault accusations against U.S. Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh; the allegations of sexual misconduct that led to the resignations of U.S. Senator Al Franken and U.S. Congressmen Tim Murphy, John Conyers Jr., and Trent Franks; and the release of a videotape of Donald Trump’s lewd conversation about women with *Access Hollywood* host Billy Bush: These are but a few of the sex scandals that have preoccupied Washington during the past couple years. Yet, no matter how contemporary such topics might seem, they are but the latest in a long history of sexual controversies in Washington and in the federal government, dating back to the earliest years of the Republic. Focusing on several such scandals in the recent and more distant past, this seminar will ask what these incidents can tell us about Americans’ changing attitudes toward sex and sexuality. We will also explore the insights these scandals provide into a number of broader historical transformations in American culture and politics, including the shifting contours of American citizenship and the definition of the

nation, the shaping of political ideologies and party warfare, the emergence of mass media and its effects on molding public opinion, and the reconfiguration of the boundary between public and private in American life. Registration restricted to CCAS freshmen.

AMST 1050.11 – Bodies of Work

Nicole Ivy

Monday & Wednesday 2:20-3:35

CRN: 48575

The National Gallery of Art's ongoing exhibition, *Bodies of Work*, explores how American painters and sculptors across the last fifty years have "reimagine[d] the human form as a site of fantasy, fear, and travail." Taking its title from this show, this course will examine how the human body has figured in cultural and historical narratives, not simply as a physical fact but as site of social and political meaning-making. Using an interdisciplinary approach that highlights visual culture analysis, we will trace how historical perspectives on the body and embodiment have shaped American culture. Our texts for this class will include both written works and visual objects. We will explore how artists and intellectuals have engaged embodiment over an expansive period of time, considering works by a diverse array of thinkers including: Thomas Jefferson, Donna Haraway, Kerry James Marshall, and Andy Warhol. Class meetings will include time spent at the National Gallery of Art, which offers free admission to all visitors.

AMST 1160.10 – Race, Gender and Law

Elizabeth Rule

Monday & Wednesday 12:45-1:35

CRN: 46034

In this course, students will explore the historical and contemporary intersections of race, gender, and law in the United States. The course will offer foundations in critical race, gender, and intersectionality theory, analyze a number of significant case studies, and contemplate historical lessons for the contemporary moment. The use of court documents, newspapers, popular culture materials, film, the digital humanities, and emerging classroom technologies will familiarize students with interdisciplinary methods of inquiry. Topics for discussion include: civil and human rights, gendered violence, mass incarceration, racial profiling, police brutality, same-sex marriage, affirmative action, and more.

AMST 2011.80 – Modern American Cultural History

Dara Orenstein

Monday & Wednesday 9:35-10:25

CRN: 46568

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. Central themes of the course include: the role of mass media in shaping a national culture; the intersections of culture and technology; changes in racial

formations and ethnic affiliations; cultural influences on our buildings, neighborhoods, and cities; cultural meanings of gender and sexual 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.

AMST 2071.80 – Introduction to Arts in American

David Bjelajac

Tuesday & Thursday 12:45-2:00

CRN: 46040

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/Popular Culture

Elisabeth Anker

Monday & Wednesday 11:10-12:00

CRN: 44220

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 2210.10 – The African American Experience

Amber Musser

Tuesday & Thursday 2:20-3:35

CRN: 47284

Much of what we think about in relation to the African American experience begins with the central question: what does it mean to have been treated as a commodity? This course uses that question as the central point for examining African American life from slavery to the present by focusing specifically on how gender and sexuality have been part of commodification and central to resisting it. Students will gain historical contexts for this question in addition to learning to analyze contemporary portrayals of African American experience in literature, film, television, and music.

AMST 2380.80 – Sexuality in U.S. History

Chad Heap
Monday & Wednesday 3:45-4:35
CRN: 44145

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 2490.10 – American Contagions

Nicole Ivy
Monday & Wednesday 4:45-6:00
CRN: 47288

This course examines how national ideas about health, disease, cleanliness, and contamination have concurrently informed and been shaped by notions of difference. Together, we will think through how forms of human difference have been historically medicalized—as unhealthy, as in need of repair or management. We will seriously consider how gender, sexuality, race, and ability continue to shape U.S. health care policy and practice. To do this, assigned course materials and class discussions will explore difficult-to-answer questions about the legacies of contagion narratives in American culture and politics. How have fears of outbreak influenced American military and economic actions? How do evolving understandings of the transmission and treatment of disease create and sustain moral panics? We will place primary sources such as political cartoons, plantation manuals, and printed broadsides in conversation with readings in social theory, feminist theory, and cultural studies. Across the semester, we will study and practice the essential skills of research, critical thinking, and textual analysis.

AMST 2490.11 – Politics of “Saving Africa”

Melani McAlister
Tuesday & Thursday 2:20-3:35
CRN: 48576

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 2710.80 – U.S. in a Global Context

Melani McAlister

Tuesday & Thursday 11:10-12:00

CRN: 47289

The course examines U.S. cultural and political global engagement in the twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries. Focusing on the transnational flow of people, ideas, and culture, the course considers the history of the US in the world in terms of how cultural products (photography, film, music, television, internet) have shaped US understandings of the rest of the world, and how they have impacted global understandings of the United States. It also examines the role of religion, the influence of travel and migration, and the impact of war, along with humanitarianism and human rights activism. Lecture plus discussion sections. Significant reading, two exams, and a research paper.

AMST 3901.10 – Examining America

Elisabeth Anker

Monday 12:45-3:10

CRN: 46049

This course offers students an introduction to the history, debates, and methodologies that are central to the field of American Studies. Students will analyze key texts in American Studies scholarship from the foundational – Myth and Symbol school to contemporary transnational works. Students will also be introduced to different approaches to interdisciplinary research. Registration restricted to American Studies majors.

AMST 3950.10 – U.S. Constructions of the Middle East

Thomas Dolan

Wednesday & Friday 11:10-12:25

CRN: 44822

As reported in December 2015, Public Policy Polling showed that 30% of Republicans and 19% of Democrats supported bombing “Agrabah,” the fictional city of Disney’s Aladdin. Among Trump supporters, the tally was even higher, as was their support for the “Muslim ban” and outlawing Islam in the US outright. How do we reconcile the fact that most Americans know so little about Islam and the Middle East, yet are equally certain of the need to ban Muslims, bomb Agrabah, or legislate against “shariah law”?

The “Middle East” and “Islam” have long been American obsessions, but the omnipresence of these concepts belies a knowledge gap, such that specifics about the region and its religions often leave us puzzled. Rather than a historical survey, this course considers various perceptions of the “Middle East” to better understand the

emotional and material investments Americans hold for the region. Exploring an expansive archive to include legislation, film, history, music, fiction and critical theory, the course embraces Melani McAlister's insight that culture and foreign policy are mutually constitutive sites of meaning-making. These insights will guide mastery of material for this course, while also providing an overview of critical debates and methodologies in American Studies writ large.

Each week of this course focuses on a particular theme to consider multiple, distinct and overlapping "Middle East." Sessions will begin with a brief lecture summarizing key theoretical concepts and historical background before a student-led discussion of the text's methodology, merits and questions. In addition, the course particularly highlights the scholarship of other GW professors to facilitate visits/Q&A with these faculty so students gain a greater understanding of the production of scholarship and feel empowered to take advantage of the many resources at their disposal.

AMST 4701W.80 – Epidemics in American History

Vanessa Gamble

Monday & Wednesday 12:45-2:00

CRN: 46278

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.

AMST 6190.10 – Folklore Theory

James Deutsch

Monday 6:10-8:00

CRN: 47295

This graduate-level seminar will explore the intellectual history of the academic field of folklore and folklife study in the United States. It will trace the rise of interpretation starting in the second half of the nineteenth century and conclude with contemporary times. Student presentations and discussions will focus on key figures in folklore theory whose careers illustrate particular interpretive techniques and positions. In addition to participation in class discussions, students will be expected to write a seminar paper (20-25 pages) on some aspect of American folklore scholarship and practice. The specific topic for the seminar paper will be selected in consultation with the instructor. The class will meet at a Smithsonian Institution facility near L'Enfant Plaza SW.

AMST 6190.11 – Bipolitics, Intimacy & Precarity

Amber Musser

Tuesday 6:10-8:00

CRN: 47296

This seminar brings together theoretical texts to examine the issue of precarity as a biopolitical formation. This means understanding precarity as a form of structural

vulnerability enabled and sustained by neoliberalism, racialization, gender, and sexuality. In order to plumb the complex theoretical and political dimensions of precarity, we will focus on recent texts in affect studies, queer of color critique, and black studies in order to compare and contrast relations to queer theory, methodological commitments, and analyses of biopolitics.

AMST 6195.10 – Cultures of Science, Tech & Medicine

Jamie Cohen-Cole

Friday 11:10-1:00

CRN: 42131

This is a research seminar in which students will write original research papers on an aspect of the cultural role of science, technology and/or medicine (STM) in America. STM has been, variously, a repository of truth and political authority, a means of imagining futures, a source of values, and site of conflict. If STM fields and their products have loomed large in American culture – even, to some, defining it – these fields have not been unmoved movers. The fields are subject to cultural and political forces and themselves have internal subcultures that are accessible to cultural critique just as much as any other aspect of American life. Thus a premise of the class is that STM and American culture, society, and politics mutually constitute one another. In writing original research papers, students may rely on sources ranging from archival materials to literary fiction, visual media, and/or material culture. We will begin by reading exemplary secondary articles that illustrate methods for the cultural analysis of STM. In certain cases, the best expression of methods has been written by historians who have looked at earlier periods. In those instances, we will examine both the methodological exemplars and the studies on American science. Students will then engage in individual research projects of their own choosing that are based in primary sources and that address important scholarly issues related to the role of STM in American culture.

AMST 6730 – Nature’s Nation and the Visual Arts

David Bjelajac

Tuesday 3:30-6:00

CRN: 44140

This course explores the visual arts in relation to a wide range of natural/human sciences and socio-economic, ecological phenomena. Common readings will address the manner in which artists, designers and cultural reformers variously envisioned human bodies and nature’s resources in aesthetic terms adapted to capitalist development and transcontinental, transoceanic expansion. Covering several centuries, the course considers American landscapes, seascapes and representations of the West, which privileged white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant values. In vernacular architecture, humble log cabins and elaborate log structures bore conflicting symbolic meanings. The seminar examines Transcendentalist nature religion and post-Darwinian evolutionary theories of human development involving issues of race, class and gender. Inspired by Asian, African, and Native American art, Modernist painters and sculptors cultivated primitive, pre-rational experiences, which mysteriously seemed to correspond with the new subatomic physics of nature’s invisible, alchemical energies. For neurologists and psychologists, the visual arts assumed therapeutic value in treating neurasthenia or nervous disorders caused by the urban, capitalist distancing of American civilization from its mythic rootedness as “nature’s nation”.