

Department of American Studies

Course Descriptions | Spring 2022

Note: Check the [GW Schedule of Classes](http://my.gwu.edu/mod/pws/) 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

M 12:45-3:15

CRN: 36116

The Walking Dead. World War Z. “Zombie Banks.” 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 screen one film per week, supplemented by brief readings in primary sources, to track the figure of the zombie from the Great Depression to the Great Recession (or, now, the Great Depression 2.0), and from the sugar plantations of Haiti to the tents of Zuccotti Park and the COVID-19 morgues of Detroit.

AMST 1200.10: The Sixties in America

Suleiman Osman

TR 12:45-1:35

CRN: 36290

This course will examine American society, culture, and politics during the dramatic decade of the 1960s. Students will examine topics that include the civil rights movement, the student movement, the Vietnam War and antiwar movement, the counterculture, the women’s movement, the environmentalist movement, and the conservative movement.

AMST 2011.80: Modern American Cultural History

Gayle Wald

MW 2:20-3:10

CRN: 37289

This course surveys US history from 1912-2020 through the lens of culture and cultural change. Instead of trying to be exhaustive, it is organized around historical moments and phenomena that reflect the course theme of “culture wars.” We are living through a moment when talk of culture wars is everywhere, and yet culture has long been a site of political struggle and social change. While lectures lay a broad groundwork, students engage with primary texts, primarily literature, film, and music, but also theater, radio, and television. Student learning is assessed through

writing assignments and a final exam, as well as through participation in weekly breakout sessions. There are no prerequisites for this course.

AMST 2410.80: Modern US Immigration History

Tom Guglielmo
MW 9:35-10:25
CRN: 17948

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. This course will satisfy a WID requirement.

AMST 2490.10: American Contagions

Nicole Ivy
TR 2:20-3:35
CRN: 34503

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 to 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: Borders and Boundaries

Elaine Pena
TR 12:45-2:00
CRN: 36117

International borders affect you every day. In the United States and elsewhere, they play a role in determining whether you are a birthright citizen or an unauthorized migrant. They showcase a nation's ability or inability to guarantee your wellbeing. They factor into comprehensive immigration reform and national security debates, including wall construction plans, that reinforce party lines and determine elections. Those who live in close proximity to an international border often deal

with a particular set of issues. Living in an either/or environment can impel border residents to strategically recognize or deny cultural forms—to be hyper patriotic, for example, or to speak one language at home and another at school. This course will draw from the work of anthropologists, political scientists, historians, geographers, and documentary filmmakers to establish a strong base in border theory and to shine light on ground up dynamics. It will use the U.S.-Mexico border as its primary reference point, but it will also draw our attention to boundary lines around the globe including places like Ceuta and Melilla in Northern Africa and the Guatemala-Mexico border.

AMST 2610W.80: Science, Tech, and Politics in Modern America

Jamie Cohen-Cole

TR 9:35-10:25

CRN: 37302

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 2710.80: US in the World

Melani McAlister

TR 11:10-12:00

CRN: 37305

This course examines US history from 1898-present in terms of its cultural and political relationships with the world beyond US borders. We will consider, among other things, US state and military power, globalizing cultures, transnational ideas and social movements, travel and tourism, and the impact of media in the context of US global power.

AMST 2750.80: Latinos in the US

Elaine Peña

TR 3:45-5:00

CRN: 35589

The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the Hispanic population will reach 111 million by 2060. But who are Hispanics? What does that term mean and how does it relate to Latino and Latinx? Can those terms accurately reflect the various communities they seek to represent? Returning to those questions throughout the semester, we will critically analyze the evolution of the term “Hispanic” and its impact on discussions of race, identity, and citizenship expectations in the United States. We will engage ethnographic and historical analyses, legal perspectives, and films that explore Hispanic, Latino, and Latinx identity formation in geographic regions across the United States and in transnational/hemispheric contexts. One of the goals of this course is to not

only identify how historical, political, and economic shifts have shaped the terms Hispanic and Latino in the United States but also connect those processes to ongoing discussions of immigration reform and border security. This course fulfills critical thinking and cross-cultural perspective learning goals.

AMST 3900.10: Critiquing Culture

Dara Orenstein
MW 9:35-10:50
CRN: 35100

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 3901.10: Examining America

Suleiman Osman
TR 2:20-3:10
CRN: 34021

This course offers students an introduction to the history, debates, and methodologies that are central to the field of American Studies. Students will be introduced to key texts in American Studies scholarship from foundational primary sources to contemporary secondary scholarship. Registration restricted to American Studies majors.

AMST 3900.10: Epidemics in American History

Vanessa Northington Gamble
MW 12:45-2:00
CRN: 34076

This course surveys the history of infectious disease epidemics in the United States from the late nineteenth century to today, including the Covid-19 pandemic. 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.

GRADUATE COURSES

AMST 6190.80, Historic American Interiors, 1800-1900

Erin Kuykendall

R, 10:00AM-12:30PM

CRN:38584

Off campus

The history of domestic interiors and furnishings in the United States relies heavily on the adaptation of European and Asian tastes, as transposed, modified or rejected by Europeans, Africans and native cultures. This multidisciplinary seminar engages the work of material culture scholars, museum curators, and art historians, as well as historical archaeologists, architectural historians, folklorists, geographers, and landscape architects. In doing so, the course traces the development of American homes, from seventeenth-century Dutch and English settlements to the lavish late nineteenth-century estates of industrialists in the Gilded Age. Major course themes consider the social, economic and technological changes that propelled design choices made by consumers, producers and retailers. Students will interpret the material evidence of domesticity, as revealed through both elegant and everyday furnishings used within or around the American home, from kitchens and bedchambers to parlors and conservatories. These changes spurred the development of new furnishing forms, ornament, room use, and spatial organization. As a result of this class, students significantly expand their knowledge of American interiors and the decorative arts; hone their professional presentation skills; conduct primary research; and strengthen their writing abilities. In addition to illustrated lectures and critical discussion, this course includes study tours to period rooms preserved by major museums and historic house museums.

AMST 6110: Cultural Theory

Gayle Wald

M 11:10-1:00

CRN: 37261

This course examines major issues in critical and cultural theory in American Studies as they relate to the study of popular music. We will organize our inquiry through a series of keywords, emphasizing recent texts but also going back to read foundational works in the field (Baraka, Adorno, Small). By using popular music as a “way in” to critical and cultural theory, the course aims to appeal both to students who have special interest in music culture and those who expect to pursue research in other fields. No special knowledge of popular music is required. Keywords include: Genre, Democracy, Blues, Aesthetics, Archive, Taste, Race, Gender, Youth, Memory, Listening, Space, Mixtape. Authors include: Fred Moten, Daphne Brooks, Nina Eidsheim, Sasha Geffen, Kyra Gaunt, Deb Paredez, Lisa Gilman, William Sites.

AMST 6195: Graduate Research Seminar

Jamie Cohen-Cole

T 2:10-4:00

CRN: 37261

What is nature and what is unnatural? What is artificial? This research class 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 and created 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. In this research seminar students will write original research papers aimed at publication in a peer reviewed journal and based on in-depth critical analysis of primary sources on this them of natural/unnatural/artificial. In writing their papers, students may rely on primary sources ranging from archival materials to literary fiction, visual media, and/or material culture.

AMST 6190: Theorizing Bodies

Nicole Ivy

R 5:10-7:00

CRN: 37817

This course is an interdisciplinary exploration of how representations of the human physical form as well as ideas about what constitutes appropriate bodies are continually re-shaped by U.S. cultural, political, social, and economic discourse. The assigned coursework will present specific theoretical emphasis on race, gender, sexuality, labor, ability, and class. During the course of this graduate seminar, we will take up key concepts associated with theories of the body in cultural studies including, but not limited to: waste, surveillance, performance, and the embodiment of the citizen/alien dynamic.

AMST 6730: American Material Culture

Katherine Ott

W 2:30-4:30

CRN: 37865

Off campus

The world is populated by things. The objects that surround us are as strange, lovable, and scary as the people. People have always used objects to learn about and integrate themselves into the human community. This course explores the world of material culture -- where things come from, why they are made the way they are, their afterlife in recycling and regifting, and how we value them or not. Using history, we'll explore the major theories, issues and diverse viewpoints and practices in the field of material culture. And we meet at the Smithsonian.