

American Studies Course Descriptions

FALL ~ 2008

Revised: 4/14/08

AMST UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

Note: All classes are held on the GW Main Campus (Foggy Bottom) unless otherwise noted. Check the GW Schedule of Classes website for specific locations, discussion sections, and the most up-to-date information at <http://my.gwu.edu/mod/pws/>.

AMST 71.80 – Introduction to American Studies

AMST 71W.80 – Introduction to American Studies (WID)

Teresa Murphy

CRN 51969 or 56544 (WID)

WF 2:20-3:10

This course will examine how American culture has evolved since the first contact between Europeans and Indians. We will examine the inter-relationship between intellectual and economic change, as well as the impact of ideas about race and gender on American social life. We will also consider the extent to which we should speak of a unified American culture or of different American cultures. This course will use an interdisciplinary approach to study these issues, drawing on art, artifacts, literary texts, and historical documents. *Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements. Note: WID students must register for a WID discussion section to satisfy both the course & WID requirements (e.g., AMST 071W.30 or 071W.31).*

AMST 139W.80 – Women in the United States (WID)

Teresa Murphy

CRN 53298

WF 9:35-10:25

This course will examine the history of women in the United States from pre-Columbian settlement until Reconstruction. We will pay particular attention to the ways in which gender has been an important component in the construction of power relationships; the ways in which issues of race and class have affected the relationships among women; and the ways in which ideas about gender have evolved during the past several centuries. *Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.*

AMST 144.80 – Explorations in Historical Geography

Eric Lindstrom

CRN 53974

T 5:10-7:00

Examination of selected themes in the cultural geography of the United States over the course of its history, in relation to an overview of the historical geography of the country.

AMST 167.80 – US Religion & Politics

Kip Kosek

CRN 53975

TR 9:35-10:25

This course explores the history of religion in American politics and public life. Main themes include: religious and secular visions of the nation; religion's role in promoting, or preventing, bigotry, conflict, and violence; the separation of church and state; religious factors in racial and gender politics; the use of religious resources in reform movements; and the relationship of religion and democracy. Likely subjects of study

include: The Constitution, the Civil War, the Social Gospel, World War II, the civil rights movement, “New Christian Right,” and American Islam. *Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.*

AMST 167.85 – Freedom in US Thought & Popular Culture

Elisabeth Anker

CRN 55108

MW 11:10-12:00

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.

Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirements.

AMST 167.90 – History of the Jews in America

Lauren Strauss

CRN 56614

TR 12:45-2:00

This course turns a wide lens on the American Jewish community from its colonial beginnings 350 years ago to the present day. Drawing on a variety of sources – personal memoirs, government documents, photographs, cookbooks, academic articles, poems, songs, and movies – the course follows the development of Jewish communal institutions and poses challenging questions about the nature of Jewish and American identity in the modern world. From Colonial America through the Civil War and the late 19th century, to the upheavals of the 20th century and beyond, students will explore one of the most complex and vibrant communities in both Jewish and American history.

AMST 168W.10 – Cultural Criticism in America (WID)

Melani McAlister

CRN 53632

TR 11:10-12:25

This seminar introduces students to major methods for understanding and interpreting cultural materials. We will explore how and why culture—particularly mass culture such as film, television, photography, music, fashion, and advertising—plays such a significant role in our lives. At various point in the semester, we will examine 1) the ways that we experience culture and ground our identities in it; 2) the ideological messages and stereotypes that circulate in cultural products; 3) the institutional, corporate and individual production of cultural products and spaces; and 4) the ways that different audiences interpret the culture they consume. This course is writing-intensive, discussion-oriented, and fulfills the WID requirement. *This course satisfies a WID requirement. Non-majors will be admitted only by permission of the instructor.*

AMST 175.80 – American Architecture (1600-1860)

Richard Longstreth

CRN 53180

MW 12:45-2:00

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 include the persistence and mixing of cultural traditions, the role of the designer, the influence of region, and architecture as a component of landscape. We will examine 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. 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. *Graduate students may take the course with the permission of the instructor.*

AMST 195.10 – Independent Study

CRN 51974

Departmental approval required to register; contact amst@gwu.edu.

AMST 198.11 – Research Seminar: Urban History

Suleiman Osman

CRN 54952

T 2:00-4:00

In this research seminar, students will conduct primary research on a topic about the history of Washington DC. While conducting their own research, students will read and comment on each other's work throughout the semester. We will address the major themes in urban history and the history of the District of Columbia. Students will be encouraged to become familiar with local archives and to explore the Washington metro area by car or foot. *Restricted to American Studies majors only (seniors & juniors; sophomores with permission).*

AMST 198.12 – Cityscapes

Suleiman Osman

CRN 54956

T 6:10-8:00

What is the "city"? In a diverse country with cityscapes as varied as Los Angeles, Detroit, Las Vegas, and New York City, what urban landscape best represents the "American city"? The course will examine the Las Vegas Strip, public housing, suburbia, "Chinatown," and a variety of American cityscapes. The course will also examine topics like suburban sprawl, gentrification, and immigration. Throughout the semester, students will give short presentations about an aspect of the diverse Washington metro area.

AMST 198.80 – Musical Cultures of Black Americans

Kip Lornell

CRN 54956

TR 12:45-2:00

This course introduces you to the distinctive musical characteristics, performance practices, and aesthetic values of African American music found throughout the United States. Through readings, lectures, documentary films, and musical examples (both live and on disc), we'll be investigating the music that emerged from several important urban areas, including Washington, DC, Detroit, and New York City.

AMST 198W.80 – Research Seminar: The 1890's (WID)

Melinda Knight

CRN 56256

W 2:10-4:00

In 1895, with the publication in English of *Degeneration*, Max Nordau created a media sensation with his argument that "degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists." Nordau's views received much publicity, heightening the perception of decadence as a particular stance toward society. In the 1890s, *fin-de-siècle* became a catch-all term to refer to various developments that challenged the Victorian ideals of restraint, order, virtuousness, and self-control, along

with a reaction to the ways in which Western culture embodied the cumulative processes of modernization at the turn of the century. Out of those transformations emerged the culture of modernism, which itself had its origins in *fin-de-siècle* movements of aestheticism and decadence. At the same time, the 1890s witnessed the rise of the modern corporation, new methods of mass production and consumption, and a phenomenal expansion of the advertising industry, along with a bifurcation of elite and popular culture. This course will explore the *fin-de-siècle* moment in American culture through manifestations of aestheticism, decadence, and bohemianism in literature, the visual arts, music, popular culture, and mass media. *Restricted to students majoring or minoring in AMST, or by permission of instructor. This course satisfies a WID requirement.*

AMST 801.10 – Devotion, Politics, and Performance

Elaine Peña

CRN 53979

W 11:10-12:25 & F 12:45-2:00

Performance does not happen exclusively on stage or on the silver screen. Globally and locally, we interweave performances of class status, race, gender, sexuality, morality, and nationality into the fabric of our everyday lives. This course examines how communities across the Americas and the Caribbean use devotional performances – pilgrimage, prayer, dance, shrine maintenance – to survive the hardships that accompany migration: economic uncertainty, xenophobia, family separation, diminishing human rights, and the socio-emotional effects of displacement. *This course is restricted to first year undergraduates.*

AMST 801.11 – Spaces, Places, and Things

John Vlach

CRN 56260

M 2:20-3:35 & W 3:45-5:00

This course will provide students with the skills to interpret the cultural messages imbedded in our material surroundings. This vast subject area we call "material culture" is made up of all sorts of humanly created artifacts ranging from specific objects to vast landscapes. The things around us can be read in ways that parallel how we draw meaning from books and other written documentation. These tangible "texts" are evidence of cultural values, such that: 1) so few people actually leave written records about their everyday experiences; and 2) material goods are an important factor in shaping the character of American life. The bulk of our classes will consist of exercises in observing, recording, describing, and interpreting various classes of artifacts. Prime targets include places (neighborhoods, work sites, water fronts, parks, shopping malls, central business districts, etc.), buildings (houses, schools, churches, stores, theaters, courthouses, etc.) and objects (tools, clothing, furnishings, artworks, etc.). We will look for what these spaces, places, structures, and things might tell us about their designers, makers, users, and consumers. Finally we will try to assemble these particular messages into a collective portrait of social life in the US. In addition to three task required papers, there will be weekly readings either from books or articles on reserve. Students' understanding of lectures and readings will be assessed by the final exam. *This course is restricted to first year undergraduates.*

Graduate Courses – continue on the next page

AMST GRADUATE COURSES

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AMST 231.10 – Scope & Methods: American Studies

Teresa Murphy

CRN 51990

R 2:00-3:50

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. *Restricted to graduate students in American Studies.*

AMST 250.10 – American Material Culture

Katherine Ott

CRN 55312

W 1:30-3:30 (Smithsonian)

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. *The class is taught by a Smithsonian history curator and meets off-campus; contact amst@gwu.edu for location details.*

AMST 251.10 – Museum Research and Education

Smithsonian Staff

CRN 51975

Internship or Independent Study at the Smithsonian. Must be arranged with the AMST Director of Graduate Studies before registration. *Contact amst@gwu.edu for further information.*

AMST 257.80 – American Folklife

John Vlach

CRN 53978

W 6:10-8:00

This course will present the materials of American folk culture concentrating particularly on folk architecture, folk crafts, and folk art. The major organizing themes of the course are regionalism and the use of objects as indicators of cultural intention. During the first half of the course we will assess the entire nation in terms of architectural expression. This will be followed by a topical consideration of insights to be gained by the analysis of objects in their social contexts. Course requirements include assigned readings and a major term paper.

AMST 277.80 – Historic Preservation: Principles and Methods

Richard Longstreth

CRN 53182

MW 4:10-6:00

This course addresses the scope and purpose of the preservation movement in the US, focusing on developments since the 1960s. Topics investigated include the development of ideas and approaches to

preservation at home and abroad since the late 18th century; the legal framework developed at the national, state, and local levels to foster preservation; the nature of and dynamics between public- and private-sector preservation organizations; and key facets of the research process essential to determine significance and set priorities to protecting historic properties. Throughout the course, both pragmatic and conceptual aspects are explored, as are the implications of preservation practice on broader realms, ranging from our attitudes toward the past to the tangible benefits for a community or business. Preservation must be a practical line of work imbued with political, technical, and economic expertise, but its ultimate worth is as a form of cultural expression. Classroom lectures and discussions are supplemented by visits from a number of nationally and locally prominent figures in the field who afford behind-the-scenes insight current initiatives and challenges. For further information, visit the AMST Historic Preservation webpage at <http://www.gwu.edu/~amst/histpres/pres.htm>.

AMST 280.10 – Field Methods: Architectural Documentation

Orlando Ridout

CRN 56257

R 4:10-6:00

In-depth thematic study of the cultural landscape, focusing on the basic field techniques and skills necessary to analyze and interpret accurately the fabric of historic buildings and their settings. Additional attention given to major thematic issues of both rural and urban landscapes. Topics considered include housing, agriculture, industry, and the architectural legacy of African American culture. A variety of building types and complexes are examined firsthand, with emphasis on the broader issue of interplay between natural and cultural landscapes. Intensive study is conducted on a single site, with members of the class divided into recording teams. Research methods based on building fabric and the physical landscape are the primary focus; work in the field constitutes a major component of the course. Schedule will include four one-day field trips on Saturdays or Sundays as selected by class members.

AMST 284.10 – Introduction to American Visual Culture: Visualizing the American West

Frank Goodyear

CRN 52528

M 6:10-8:00

This reading seminar serves as an introduction to the visual culture of the trans-Mississippian West, paying particular attention to a range of historic themes and critical approaches. The course will consider a diverse assortment of Native and non-Native visual texts from the past two hundred years and will foreground the role that images have played in the often complicated network of relationships concerning this region. The contested nature of the West's identity and this region's relationship with the East will also be significant topics for discussion. Through an interrogation of the visual texts that constitute the West's history and the scholarly inquiries regarding these images, this course aspires to prepare students for advanced study in this field.

AMST 286.80 – Interpretation: Historic House Museum

Carol Stapp

CRN 51976

T 11:10-1:00

Visit a different historic house every week, meeting with knowledgeable staff and enjoying privileged access. Over the course of the semester, tour the public spaces and/or go behind the scenes of the following sites, among others: Frank Lloyd Wright's Pope/Leighey House (and the adjacent Woodlawn Plantation), the Woodrow Wilson House, Hillwood Museum and Gardens, the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, Decatur House, and George Washington's Mount Vernon. The seminar integrates advanced practices of museum education with current scholarship in architectural history, material culture, and social history. *Admission by permission of instructor.*

AMST 289.80 – Religion & American Culture

Kip Kosek

CRN 56258

T 12:45-3:15

This seminar focuses on religious people, religious communities, and representations of religion in the United States, as well as the intersections between the “religious” and the “secular.” We will consider the ways that serious attention to religion might change our perspective on other subjects, such as: race and ethnicity; gender, sexuality, and the family; capitalism and consumer society; scientific knowledge; mass media; social and political movements; material and visual culture; nationalism and transnationalism. This course will also assess the relative merits of various disciplinary approaches to the study of religion, such as those of anthropology, sociology, and ethnography.

AMST 289.81 – Debating Democracy in America

Elisabeth Anker

CRN 56259

M 2:10-4:00

Democracy is one of the most frequently used and least agreed upon terms in American public life. Various conceptualizations as equality, public dissent, individual and artistic expression, elections, a free-market economy, or a mix of all of these ideas, “democracy” has been used to justify many disparate social practices. This course will examine key debates on the practice and possibility of democracy in America. Issues will include the meaning of democracy, practices of democratic citizenship, forms of democratic dissent and resistance, connections between democracy and violence, and the role of the news media and the culture industry in shaping American politics. Together, we will critically engage various political theories, films, public speeches, and news coverage on current controversies, foregrounding each text’s specificity as well as the possibility and limitations of different modes of textual engagement. In addition, throughout the course we will focus on method, emphasizing how to read visual media and theoretical texts. Readings will include the Federalist and anti-Federalist Papers, Jefferson, Tocqueville, Marx, DuBois, Horkheimer and Adorno, Marcuse, Arendt, Habermas, Sheldon Wolin, Wendy Brown, Michael Rogin. Films will include *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Fury*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *Manchurian Candidate*, *Born in Flames*, *Syriana*.

AMST 295.10 – Independent Study

CRN 51977

AMST 299.10 – Thesis Research

CRN 51978

AMST 300.10 – Thesis Research

CRN 51979

AMST 398.10 – Advanced Reading & Research

CRN 51982

AMST 399.10 – Dissertation Research

CRN 51983

Additional graduate courses in affiliated departments – continue on the next page

GRADUATE COURSES: AFFILIATED DEPARTMENTS

The following is a list of additional Fall 2008 Graduate courses in other departments related to the field of American Studies (please consult CCAS Schedule of Classes to confirm details at <http://my.gwu.edu/mod/pws/>). When in doubt, be sure to confirm your choices with your advisor.

AH 254	Seminar: 19th-Century American Art (Bjelajac)
AH 256	Seminar: American Art in the 20th Century (Dumbadze)
AH 258	Seminar: Historiography (Bjelajac)
ANTH 202	Proseminar: Sociocultural Anthropology (Allen)
ANTH 250	Nationalism and Ethnicity (TBD)
ANTH 251	Anthropology of Security (Feldman)
ANTH 257	Gender and Sexuality (Kelly)
ANTH 258	Art, Aesthetics, Symbolism (Allen)
ANTH 259	Madness, Culture, Psychiatry (Grinker)
ENG 203	Introduction to Literary Theory (Alcorn)
ENG 231	Nineteenth Century (Frawley)
ENG 235	Twentieth Century (Sten)
ENG 251	Women and Writing (Romines)
HIST 257	Re-Thinking Cold War History (Hershberg)
HIST 261	Reading/Research Seminar: Modern Latin America (Klaren)
HIST 264	Seminar: Immigration/Ethnicity in the US (Anbinder)
HIST 297	Modern Middle East (Robinson)
HIST 297	War & Memory in Middle East (Khoury)
HIST 297	The Atlantic World (Silverman & Norton)
HIST 772	American Medicine & Public Health: African American Experience (Gamble)
MSTD 297	Historic House Interpretation (Rice)
PSC 205	Readings in Political Theory (Creppell)
PSC 286	Intro-Political Psychology (TBD)
SOC 238	Seminar: Development of Sociological Theory (Chambliss)
SOC 245	Race Relations (Wenger)
SOC 250	Urban Sociology (Marschall)
SOC 258	Deviance and Control (Weitzer)
SOC 262	Corrections (Buntman)
SOC 268	Race, Gender and Class (TBD)
SOC 286	The Law of Race and Slavery (Cottrol)
WSTU 241	Woman and the Law (Warbelow)
WSTU 270	Seminar: Global Domestic Labor Studies (Moshenberg)