

American Studies Course Descriptions

SPRING ~2010

Revised: 10/22/09 @ 12:00pm

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 102.80 – Modern American Cultural History

Prof. Joseph Kosek

TR 9:35 – 10:25

This course is meant to be a foundational survey for students in American Studies and other students interested in the creation of modern American culture. We will define culture broadly to consider social customs and beliefs as well as more specific forms of literary and artistic expression. Central themes of the course include: the rise of consumer culture; the role of mass media in shaping a national culture; the impact of cultural values on the physical landscape; changes in racial formations and ethnic affiliations; cultural constructions of gender and sexuality; and the political meanings of cultural conflict. We will also explore transnational influences on American culture, as well as the effects of American culture abroad. The course draws on many different kinds of primary sources, including memoirs, short stories, films, political speeches, music, photographs, and television shows. In addition, we will read competing interpretations of culture from a variety of scholars and begin to produce our own cultural histories. *Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.*

AMST 125.80 – 20th-Century U.S. Immigration

Prof. Thomas Guglielmo

TR 12:45 – 1:35

This course will examine 20th century U.S. immigration by focusing on a series of related questions: America is a "land of immigrants," we are told, but what does this mean? Who are these immigrants? Where have they come from, why did they leave their homelands, and what were their migration processes like? How many returned home after a brief stint in the United States, how many stayed, and how many others traveled back and forth for years? For those immigrants who stayed, how were they treated when they got here—by neighbors, co-workers, employers, schoolmates, and the federal government? How did they respond to the new economic, political, and social challenges and opportunities of the United States? How have factors such as race, gender, class, and generation shaped their lives? How have immigrants changed the United States? How has the United States changed immigrants? How have the answers to these questions changed—or not changed—over time? *Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.*

AMST 140.80 – Women in the United States

Prof. Cynthia Harrison (Women's Studies Dept.)

TR 3:45 – 5:00

This course will examine the experience of women in their social, economic, and political roles to understand how gender shapes experience. The exploration will include the impact of class, region, race, and ethnicity on women and on gender roles and the effect of the changes in women's roles on men

AMST 145.80 – Folk Arts in America

Prof. John Vlach

M 2:20 – 3:35 & W 3:45 – 5:00

This course will present an overview of folk art traditions within the United States. Examples will include works produced by a variety of ethnic and regional groups including Native Americans, African Americans, and Euro-Americans. Examples of blacksmithing, pottery, quilting, woodcarving, ceramics, and other genres will be surveyed. Lectures will be organized by artistic media. Several examples within each medium will be discussed to illustrate significant aspects of historical development, cultural variation, technical expertise, and/or creative innovation. Lectures will all be illustrated with slides (some films may be shown) and we may also have some visiting specialists give presentations.

AMST 167.80 – Jewish Lives in 19th and 20th Century America

Prof. Jenna Weissman Joselit (History Dept.)

TR 11:10 – 12:25

This course explores the personal dimensions of the American Jewish experience over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. Drawing on autobiography, memoir, novels, oral history and film, it focuses on the stunning variety of ways in which American Jews have chosen to define themselves – then, as now. How did earlier generations of Jews reflect and act on their identity as Jews? As Americans? As American Jews? Through close consideration of these and other questions, this course offers an intimate portrait of a complex, lively and always-changing community.

AMST 167.81 – Jews and the American Political Tradition

Prof. Lauren Strauss (History Dept.)

TR 11:10 – 12:25

The extent of Jewish participation in the American political process far outweighs the relative number of Jews in the population. Yet, the contemporary activism of Jews as elected officials, leaders of political organizations, activists, and outspoken journalists is consistent with a tradition of civic involvement from the earliest days of Jewish settlement in America. In this course, we begin with a brief overview from the Colonial era through the 19th century, and then focus on the watershed politics of the 20th and early 21st centuries, from labor strikes to landmark legal cases and the struggles for minority and women's rights. Our dialogue also includes the growing number of Jewish elected officials and Jews active in politically conservative organizations. Most importantly, we address the question of what it means to be a Jew in a society that offers the greatest freedoms – and temptations to assimilate – of any country that the Jewish people has ever inhabited.

AMST 167W.80 – Performance and Culture in America (WID)

Prof. Elaine Peña

TR 3:55 – 4:45

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 way we experience culture every day. Using an inter-American approach, this intensive writing course will introduce students to the idea of performance as a mode of analysis. Moreover, it will deepen their understanding of the links among everyday and extraordinary performances, cultural production, and socio-political circumstance. *This course satisfies a WID requirement. Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.*

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

Prof. Laura Cook Kenna

MW 12:45 – 2:00

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 admitted w/permission of instructor.*

AMST 170.80 – The American City

Prof. Suleiman Osman

WF 11:10-12:00

Contemporary American cities are incredibly diverse making them both difficult and exhilarating to study. This interdisciplinary course will explore the political, architectural and demographic evolution of a variety of American urban landscapes after World War II. Some of the landscapes examined will be the “ghetto,” Edge Cities, public housing, the suburbs, new immigrant enclaves, Disneyworld, and gentrified downtown neighborhoods. The course will include works by Jane Jacobs, Mike Davis, Michael Sorkin, Malcolm X and clips from the TV show “The Wire.” *Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement. Not open to students who have taken “Race & Ethnicity in US Cities.”*

AMST 172.80 – U.S. Social History

Prof. Richard Stott (History Dept.)

MW 12:45 – 2:00

AMST 176.80 – American Architecture: 1860-Present

Prof. Richard Longstreth

MW 12:45 – 2:00

This course examines selected aspects of the built environment in the United States from the Gilded Age to the eve of World War II. Stylistic properties, functions, common tendencies of design, technological developments, and urban 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 changing, multi-faceted nature of eclecticism; the exponential growth of metropolitan areas; the emergence and development of tall commercial buildings; the rise of a comprehensive approach to planning; the enduring importance of the single-family house; evolving views of nature and landscape design; the pursuit of fantasy and reality in design; the impact of mass transportation systems and motor vehicles on the landscape; the reluctant acceptance of modernism; and the varied impacts of technology. Detailed examination is made of the contribution made by many celebrated figures in design, including Daniel Burnham, Frank Furness, Charles and Henry Greene, Irving Gill, Richard Morris Hunt, Charles McKim, Richard Neutra, Henry Hobson Richardson, John Wellborn Root, R. M. Schindler, Gustav Stickley, Stanford White, and Frank Lloyd Wright. At the same time, attention is given to broad tendencies in design and their effect upon suburban and urban landscapes. The impact immigrants and new ideas from abroad is examined throughout the decades covered. Lectures are profusely illustrated.

AMST 180W.10 – Proseminar in American Studies: Gentrification

Prof. Suleiman Osman

W 2:10 – 4:00

Whether referred to as “urban revitalization,” “yuppification,” or the “back-to-the-city” movement, gentrification has dramatically reshaped cities like Washington DC in the past several decades. Scholars are divided about how to define gentrification and whether it is of benefit or detriment to American cities. In this research seminar, students will conduct primary research about the historical or contemporary landscape of gentrification in Washington DC. While conducting their own research, students will read and comment on each other’s work throughout the semester. Students will be encouraged to become familiar with local archives and to explore the Washington metro area by car or foot. *This course satisfies a WID requirement. Non-majors will be admitted only by permission of the instructor.*

AMST 181.80 – US Media & Cultural History

Prof. Laura Cook Kenna

MW 9:35 – 10:25

This course will examine mass culture – film, radio, television, internet – and its role in US history from the turn of the 20th century to the present. Focusing on media production, consumption, and reception, this course will consider the historical contexts in which media emerged and developed. The cultural texts we will study range from silent films to 50s sitcoms and 90s 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 research paper in which students analyze a media artifact in its historical and cultural context. *Students must also register for a discussion section to satisfy the course requirement.*

AMST 198.80 – Field Methods in Latino Culture

Prof. Elaine Peña

R 10:30 – 12:30

This course is a practicum in field research method and performance ethnography for upper-level undergraduates. Graduate students who are in the throes of research are also welcome. The main prerequisite is that you enter the class with an urge to explore DC so that you can hit the ground running. This course forms part of a research initiative organized by the Latino Center at the Smithsonian. As such, your work with Latino communities in the DC area will form part of their archive and lead to exhibitions and programming. We will focus our attention towards fieldwork, which is a craft between labor and art. And, like any craft, it is learned primarily in two ways: 1) Through example—advice, guidance, mentoring, inspiration passed on from the stories, struggles, and writings of experienced ethnographers; and 2) Through practice—direct, hands-on experiential immersion in a fieldwork project, learning by doing. We will work towards the goal of engaging in local fieldwork but we will always keep an eye on transnational and global ties. How much you get out of the class depends on your willingness to roll up your sleeves, get your feet wet in a field site, and start experiencing first hand all the gritty complexities, challenges, frustrations, and joys of doing ethnography.

AMST 198W.10 – America in the 1990s

Ramzi Fawaz

T 3:30 – 6:00

This course will offer a cultural history of America in the 1990s, using media and popular culture, social movements, and key intellectual debates to reconstruct the cultural and political conflicts that came to define the last years of the 20th century. Not only did the decade signal the end of the cold war, it also saw the ascendancy of the Clinton administration, the first Gulf War, the most severe racial conflicts since the Civil Rights era, the acceleration of globalization, and extraordinary advances in medicine and technology that continue to shape our everyday lives. By investigating these and other events that shaped national identity in the 1990s, we will unpack the diverse ways Americans reinterpret, transform, and fantasize the American past. We will discuss a range of topics including the “Culture Wars,” the AIDS epidemic, feminism and gay liberation, the internet, the human genome project, mass consumerism, and national debates over violence and ethics in the global “war on terror.” In addition to regular reading and writing assignments, students will be required to watch an assigned film each week. *This course satisfies a WID requirement.*

AMST 198W.11 – Americans Abroad: Fiction & Film

Matthew Kohlstedt

R 3:30 – 6:00

Authors and filmmakers have used many adjectives to describe their American subjects’ encounters abroad: innocent, ugly, quiet, imperial. This course will examine different depictions of Americans abroad in fiction and film from the late 19th century to the early Cold War. Starting with Mark Twain’s account of his trip around the world in 1897, we will discuss how the figure of the American has been constructed as both a force for ill and for tremendous good, sometimes simultaneously. We will watch

classic films such as *Casablanca*, *Foreign Correspondent*, and *The Third Man*; and read texts like *Following the Equator* and *The Quiet American*. Using theoretical texts as our guides of analysis, we will employ our writing to explore the changing and conflicting images of Americans abroad. *This course satisfies a WID requirement.*

AMST 771.80 – Epidemics in American History

Prof. Vanessa Gamble

MW 12:45 – 3:15

This course is restricted to third & fourth year undergraduates, and graduate students.

DEAN'S SEMINARS

AMST 801.10 – Washington Sex Scandals

Prof. Chad Heap

T 3:30-6:00

Senator John Ensign's affair with a campaign staffer, Senator Larry Craig's visit to the men's restroom at the Minneapolis airport, Senator David Vitter's call to the Washington Madam's escort service: These are a few of the sex scandals that have preoccupied Washington during the past few years. Yet, no matter how contemporary such topics might seem, they are but the latest in a long history of sexual controversies in Washington, dating back at least to the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. Focusing on several incidents in the recent and more distant past, this seminar will ask not only what the history of Washington's sex scandals can tell us about Americans' changing attitudes toward sexuality over the past two centuries but also how a careful examination of these scandals can provide new insights into 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. Students will be introduced to methods of cultural analysis and writing, as well as to research opportunities in local archives and libraries. *This course is restricted to first-year undergraduates.*

AMST 801.11 – Food in Washington DC

Prof. Phyllis Palmer

F 12:45 – 3:15

This seminar will use an American Studies approach of cultural analysis to investigate the representations and realities of the current American food system. Inspired by Michael Pollan's observation that health, environmental, and energy issues are all food issues, the course will ask how popular cultural images about farming, food, and eating sustain a harmful food system and how such images can be mobilized to transform the current system. Industry explanations from food, seed, and agribusiness companies will be matched with critiques and alternatives from food activists, sustainable farmers, and conscientious consumers through examination of websites, TV shows, films, ads, books, and public campaigns. The overarching questions are: How do Americans think about the food system we inhabit? How could we imagine a healthier and more sustainable system? How can each of us contribute to a cleaner, safer, more nutritious food environment? To better grasp these complex issues, we will examine arguments and representations in some focused debates, such as local versus global food markets; hybrid versus genetic modification; vegetarianism versus meat-eating; and industrial versus sustainable food production and distribution. In the spirit of Julia Child and Jamie Oliver, we will also prepare and eat some real food. *This course is restricted to first-year undergraduates.*

AMST 801.12 – The Sixties

Prof. Suleiman Osman

F 1:00 – 3:00

This course will examine American society, culture, and politics during the dramatic decade of the 1960's. Topics will include the New Frontier, the Great Society, the civil rights movement, the student movement, the Vietnam War, the counterculture, feminism, and the rise of the New Right. *This course is restricted to first-year undergraduates.*

AMST 801.13 – DC Renaissance: Black Culture in the Nation's Capital

Prof. James Miller

F 12:45 – 3:15

This seminar will examine aspects of African American life and history in Washington, D.C., from the period now known as the Harlem Renaissance to the present. The seminar will consist of encounters with literature, visual culture, music and film, as well as visits to historic sites and other venues in the D.C. area. *This course is restricted to first-year undergraduates.*

Graduate courses continue on the next page.

GRADUATE COURSES

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/>

AMST 201.10 – Scope & Methods in American Studies

Prof. Teresa Murphy

F 12:45 – 3:15

This course is required of all graduate students and will introduce students to the history of American Studies as well as current debates animating the field and future directions that are anticipated. Students will read widely in the scholarly literature, critiquing it in class and through writing assignments. Students will also use these readings to undertake an analysis of primary materials for their final project.

AMST 245.80: Gender, Sexuality, and American Culture Since 1876

Prof. Chad Heap

W 12:45-3:15

This graduate seminar is designed to introduce students to the usefulness of gender and sexuality as categories of analysis in American Studies. Focusing on the post-Reconstruction era, we will read broadly across the field of sexuality and gender studies in U.S. history, ethnography, cultural and visual studies, and critical theory. We will examine the roles of gender and sexuality in shaping American culture; 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, citizenship, age, and the body; to the spatial organization of gender and sexuality in relation to the city, the border, the state, empire, and globalization; and to the role that cultural discourses and products—including film, photography, news media, literature, medicine, science, and the law—play in shaping the popular understanding of sexuality and gender and vice versa.

AMST 253.10 – American Decorative Arts (Smithsonian)

Prof. Nancy Davis

M 2:10 – 4:00

This course will explore how Asia affected American material and popular culture from the 18th century to the present. The earliest American trade and contact with China began shortly after the American Revolution and continues unabated today. The class will investigate the origins of chinoiserie and examine the varied goods of the early- to mid-19th century China Trade affecting the middling American household. We will also explore oriental imports for the Victorian home, and the later Asian influence on Art Nouveau and the Aesthetic Movement through popular culture aspects of the 21st century. A range of 19th-21st century decorative arts, material culture, and popular culture goods will be discussed, including ceramics, metalwork, furniture, textiles, decorative fancy goods, home furnishings, and silver. *Course will be taught at the Smithsonian. Please contact Dept. for details at amst@gwu.edu.*

AMST 269.80 – Religion and American Culture

Prof. Joseph Kosek

R 2:10 – 4:00

This graduate seminar focuses on religious people, communities, and cultures in the historical and contemporary 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, including: 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. The course will also explore how scholars in different fields, such as anthropology, sociology, history, and literature, have studied religion differently.

AMST 276.10 – Economics of Preservation

Prof. Richard Wagner

R 6:10 – 8:00

This course will examine economic factors that contribute to the preservation of historic buildings, districts and landscapes by investigating basic techniques of financial *pro formas*, incentive programs and economic sustainability of the existing historic environment.

AMST 278.80 – Historic Preservation: Principles and Methods

Prof. Richard Longstreth

MW 4:10 – 6:00

This course investigates selected aspects of contemporary preservation practice in the U.S., including the survey and documentation of historic properties, the nature of historic districts and the changes to which they are subjected over time, the bearing of physical context for historic properties, the meanings of significance in historic preservation and the criteria by which it is determined, and the implications of new design within a preservation framework. The primary focus of this course is on physical aspects of preservation and on the broad issues these aspects represent. While class lectures and discussions will address these concerns in a general way, the opportunity to explore some matters in detail and out in the field will be afforded by the semester assignment. The class will undertake in depth historical analysis of a neighborhood/community in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, coordinating this work with residents, civic organizations, and local officials. Through detailed survey of properties and research using pertinent archival and published sources, as well as through oral histories and field work, this project will result in a wide-ranging exploration of those characteristics that make the area in question historically significant. Places examined by previous classes range from mid-nineteenth-century agricultural settlements to mid-twentieth-century suburban enclaves, a portion of the U.S. Route 1 commercial corridor to an urban renewal precinct in Washington. This work has in turn led to a number of National Register and/or local districts as well as thematic studies.

AMST 284.10 – American Photography: Theory & Practice

Prof. Frank Goodyear

M 6:10 – 8:00

Over the course of the last 170 years, photography has emerged as the dominant visual medium in American society. Photographic images have played a central role in mediating our understanding of the different social, political, and cultural landscapes in America. This graduate seminar will consider the many ways in which photography has been practiced by individuals, theorized by visual culture scholars, and incorporated into American life. We will look especially at the unique nature of the medium and interrogate the different traditions and usages that have grown up around it. Readings will comprise a selection of recent books on the theory and practice of photography in America. Students will be required to complete two writing assignments. The first assignment is a five-page critical review of the book you chose to report on. This essay will be due one week after your in-class report. It is expected that this essay will be more than a summary of the book's contents, but will be rather a paper that interrogates its methods and conclusions. Each student will also research and write a 15 to 20 page essay on an original topic in this field. During the final three weeks of the semester, students will have an opportunity to present their research to the class.

AMST 289.10 – American Vernacular Architecture

Prof. John Vlach

W 6:10 – 8:00

This course will examine that portion of the built environment identified as the vernacular; that is, buildings that derive from local, regional, popular, and folk sources rather than the structures designed by architects or dependent on 'official styles.' We will analyze and discuss the buildings of ordinary citizens which, in the main, are dwelling houses and their associated spaces and structures. Over the course of the semester we will not only investigate the range and history of vernacular forms but will also consider various modes of interpretation, the techniques for recording structures, and the uses of vernacular

architecture in the museum and preservation professions. Lectures will be supplemented by field trips planned for selected weekends. In addition to participation in class discussions, students will be expected to prepare a seminar paper on some aspect of American vernacular architecture.

AMST 289.80 – Devotion, Politics & Performance

Prof. Elaine Peña

T 10:30 – 12:30

This course focuses on the links among globalization, geographic mobility, and religious practices. Using ethnographic studies, documentaries, sociological, and political economic perspectives, we will consider how ethnoreligious diasporic communities use devotional practices and idioms to survive the hardships that accompany migration (forced and voluntary): economic uncertainty, xenophobia, family separation, diminishing human rights, and the socio-emotional effects of displacement. *Registration restricted to graduate students only.*

AMST 289.81 – Ten Commandments in Modern America

Prof. Jenna Weissman Joselit (History Dept.)

W 3:30 – 6:00

In the United States of the 21st century few issues are as hotly debated as religion, especially when it comes to the Ten Commandments. Some citizens, claiming that the Ten Commandments are as American as apple pie, insist they should be displayed as often and as prominently as possible. Others, pointing to the separation of church and state, insist that the Ten Commandments have no place in the public square. And still other Americans are caught in the middle, torn between the Bible and the Constitution. This seminar contextualizes the current debate, which has reached all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and into the streets of the nation's cities. Drawing on literature and the media (both old and new), the arts and the law, it explores the variety of ways in which this ancient text has left its mark on America of the 20th and 21st centuries. *Registration restricted to graduate students only.*

AMST 290.80 – Research in Race and Ethnicity

Prof. Thomas Guglielmo

T 6:10 – 8:00

This is a graduate research seminar on race and ethnicity. We will focus on individual research and writing—and on reading and commenting on each other's work. The primary course goal is for each student to produce a primary-source research paper that, with slight revision, can be—and will be—submitted to a scholarly journal for publication. We will work collaboratively and deliberately, moving from central questions and reviews of relevant literature to formal proposals and preliminary and final drafts. At term's end, my hope is that you will have produced a paper that you are not only proud of, but one that you're ready, or close to ready, to send out into the wider scholarly world.

AMST 290.81 – 20th Century: (Re-)Reading the “Harlem Renaissance”

Prof. James Miller

R 3:30 – 6:00

Taking as its point of departure the period now known as the Harlem Renaissance, this research seminar will re-visit the period through the lens of the scholarship produced during the last decade, particularly the work reflecting the scholarly turn towards diasporic, transatlantic, and transnational studies—including Paul Gilroy, Brent Hayes Edwards, Barbara Foley, and others. In addition to reading and critiquing primary works from the period, students will be expected to conduct primary research on a topic related to the seminar and complete a research paper. This seminar assumes at least a broad familiarity with some of the key writers, artists and thinkers associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

AMST 771.80 – Epidemics in American History

Prof. Vanessa Gamble

MW 12:45 – 3:15

This course is restricted to third & fourth year undergraduates, and graduate students.

INDEPENDENT STUDY: GRADUATE COURSES

For the following independent courses: *Students must register with department approval and an assigned advisor. Since credits for these courses can range from 1-12, the approved number of credits must be specified during the registration process.*

AMST 295.10 – Independent Study: MA students only

AMST 299.10 – Thesis Research: MA students only

AMST 300.10 – Thesis Research: MA students only

AMST 398.10 – Adv. Reading & Research: PhD students only

AMST 399.10 – Dissertation Research: PhD students only

CCAS 920.10 – Continuing Research: MA students only

Master's students who have met their credit requirements, but are still working on research to complete their degree must register for this Columbian College (CCAS) one-credit course in lieu of an American Studies (AMST) course. *Students must register with department approval and an assigned advisor.*

CCAS 940.10 – Continuing Research: PhD students only

Doctoral students who have met their credit requirements, but are still working on research to complete their degree must register for this Columbian College (CCAS) one-credit course in lieu of an American Studies (AMST) course. *Students must register with department approval and an assigned advisor.*