

SPRING 2014

AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE OFFERINGS

AM 103W 001 Intro The Wizard of Oz

An interdisciplinary analysis of *The Wizard of Oz*, this course will examine the numerous adaptations of L. Frank Baum's classic tale to introduce students to the study of American culture, past and present. Students will read critically, think historically, practice interdisciplinarity, and acknowledge the intersections of race, class, and gender in order to analyze the ways that *The Wizard of Oz*, in its many versions, has reflected and shaped American culture. Students will consider primary and secondary sources that explore Oz through a range of media (fiction, film, theater, television, and music) and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. In addition to reading Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), students will consider MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939); the "super soul" Broadway musical, *The Wiz* (1975), and its 1978 film adaptation; Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973); Gregory Maguire's *Wicked* (1996); Stephen Schwartz's 2003 Broadway musical version of the Maguire novel; ABC television's *The Muppets' Wizard of Oz* (2005); and the television mini-series *Tin Man* (2007) **Megan Williams, 4 credits**

AM 221 Methods and Approaches

An introduction to American studies scholarship, methodologies, and approaches to the study of society and culture in the United States. Course materials include "classics" in American studies as well as the most recent scholarship: the "myth and symbol" school, the culture concept, psychoanalytic methodologies, new literary and feminist critiques, material culture and oral history resources, mass and popular culture analyses, with attention to issues of race, gender, class, and ethnicity throughout. The intent of the course is to offer students a variety of opportunities to sharpen their analytical, research, and writing skills from interdisciplinary and historiographic perspectives. **Daniel Nathan, 4 credits**

AM 233 001 America on Film

This course is an interdisciplinary introduction to the history and structure of classical Hollywood film and the cultural factors that shaped past cinematic depictions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Students will consider the significance of American cinema between the mid-1910s and early 1960s as a cultural institution that has shaped and reflected racism, class inequality, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism in the United States.

Megan Williams, 4 credits

AM 260 Baseball and American Culture

The class examines the history of baseball from its emergence as a child's game in the 1840 to its present status as a billion dollar industry. We look at the influences of broader social, economic and cultural changes on baseball; how baseball was contoured by its development into a professional commercial-spectator sport; the various meanings that different social/racial and demographic groups bring to an extrapolate from their engagement with baseball and how this has changed over time; labor-management relations; baseball and various media forms; the globalization of the diamond game; and of course, the ever presence and expanding presence of dollars; and explore not only how baseball came to be envisioned as the national pastime but how it embodies Americana and all this designates. **Melvin Adelman, 3 credits**

AM 260I 001 Post-Apocalyptic Film and Literature

Fear of nuclear warfare in the mid-twentieth century led to a surge in family home bomb shelters and elaborate underground fortresses intended for high-profile public officials and authorities. A computer glitch that threatened to bring an end to the electronic age, spurred the Y2K problem, prompting people to hoard water and provisions on the millennium's cusp. Religious groups continue to forecast an apocalypse and currently, the Mayan calendar predicts December 21, 2012 as that "end date." The DIY and self-subsistence movements reflect a desire to broaden our skill sets as much as they reflect a desire for readiness in the face of imminent disaster. Threats of an apocalypse shape human behavior, practices and identity. How these are imagined and what happens in the aftermath can tell us about who we are, how we will behave in crisis, what we are afraid of and who matters. **Beck Krefting, 4 credits**

AM 342 Black Feminist Thoughts

Examines the development and materialization of Black American feminist thoughts within historical, social, political, and cultural contexts. Interdisciplinary in focus, it surveys feminist politics and theories through films, popular culture, manifestos, literary texts, and theoretical and historical essays. In addition, the course will address how the concepts of black feminism and black womanhood overlap and diverge in accordance with the modes of representation used to articulate them. **Note(s):** 300-level courses in American Studies are not ordinarily open to first-year students except by permission of the instructor. (Designated a Cultural Diversity course.)

Beck Krefting, 3 credits

AM 361 American Material Culture

This course is an introduction to the material aspects of American culture — the variety of ways in which artifacts serve as social and cultural documents. Artifacts include three-dimensional objects such as furniture, clothing, toys, buildings and other structures, architecture and art styles, as well as industrial archaeology and other aspects of the built environment that serve as tangible records of life and culture in the United States over time. **Megan Williams, 4 credits**

AM 376X Reading *The Wire*

This course is about the critically acclaimed HBO series *The Wire*, which ran for five seasons (2002-2008) and 60 episodes. Produced by former journalist David Simon, the author of *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* (1991) and, with Edward Burns, *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (1997), *The Wire* is a remarkable, multi-layered text. Set in Baltimore, it offers a Dickensian (some critics say "Balzac-ian") portrait of a post-industrial, racially divisive, impoverished city in crisis. At the same time, as *Time* puts it, "the series—which, by the way, is also a fantastically realistic cop show—is also funny and the opposite of nihilist, giving everyone from detectives to junkies dignity. Occasionally, it even offers a glimpse of something like hope, which is all the sweeter for being harder earned." A complicated narrative with many recurring characters and interwoven plotlines, *The Wire* is an entertaining, engaging, poignant drama. More important, it is an important work of art and cultural criticism, with many targets: the failed drug war, most obviously, but the show's critique is both broader and deeper than that. At its heart, the show is about failing institutions—local government and politics, public education and the media—

and moral decay. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, this class will study *The Wire* from myriad perspectives. It will consider the show's form and politics, which are contested and open to multiple readings. Students will also carefully consider the many contexts (historical, local, national, etc.) in which the show is embedded. Our readings will include Rafael Alvarez's *The Wire: Truth Be Told* (2004) and Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall's collection *The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television* (2009), as well as numerous articles—popular and scholarly—about the show and interviews with its producers. **Daniel Nathan, 4 credits**