

SPRING 2016

AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE OFFERINGS

AM 103 001 Myth and Symbol in American Studies

M 9:05-10:00

WF 8:40-10:00 Gregory Pfitzer, 4 credits

An introduction to the ways in which myths and symbols function in American culture. Students will study the life-cycle of national myths, considering how myths develop initially as mirrors for reflecting and testing cultural experience; how they gradually change over time to accommodate altering cultural conditions; and how they eventually outlive their usefulness. In particular the course focuses on the pervasive mythology of the American frontier, paying special attention to how, once the physical frontier disappeared in the late nineteenth century, Americans transferred their ambitions for the West to imperial outposts in the Caribbean and the Pacific in the early twentieth century, and then to outer space in the late twentieth century, where astronauts replaced cowboys as the archetypal American heroes and where the successes and failures of western frontier development were recapitulated in space exploration and development.

AM 103W 001 American Cultural Geographies

Tu Th 12:40-2:00 Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas 4 credits

Introduction to the interdisciplinary study of American culture, past and present. Emphasizes reading critically, thinking historically, practicing interdisciplinarity, and acknowledging diversity. Students will analyze and synthesize multiple kinds of primary sources (such as fiction, film, music, art) and disciplinary perspectives (sociology, economics, media criticism) to appreciate better the complexity of American life and culture.

Note(s): (Fulfills social science requirement.)

AM 103W 002 American Cultural Geographies

Tu Th 12:40-2:00 Amber Wiley 4 credits

Introduction to the interdisciplinary study of American culture, past and present. Emphasizes reading critically, thinking historically, practicing interdisciplinarity, and acknowledging diversity. Students will analyze and synthesize multiple kinds of primary sources (such as fiction, film, music, art) and disciplinary perspectives (sociology, economics, media criticism) to appreciate better the complexity of American life and culture.

Note(s): (Fulfills social science requirement.)

AM 221 Methods and Approaches

Tu Th 9:10-11:00 Beck Krefting, 4 credits

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.

AM 234 001 American Sports/American Culture

Tu Th 11:10-12:30 Daniel Nathan, 4 credits

A historical examination of 300 years of sport in America as an important expression of culture, conflict, and meaning. Special attention is devoted to the ways in which contemporary sports provide a window into politics, economics, racial and ethnic relations, class formation, and gender identity. Students analyze the ways in which Americans have played, watched, and understood sports and will focus on some of the recurrent cultural values, trends, and symbolism associated with American athletes and public life.

Note(s): (Fulfills social sciences requirement.)

AM 260 001 Museums in American Culture

Tu Th 3:40-5:00 Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas, 3 credits

What do material objects and cultural relics tell us about individual and collective experiences, past and present? How do people and cultures assemble, preserve, and display objects of cultural significance to form narratives of cultural history, and who or what determines what is “culturally significant”? To answer these and other questions, this course will provide students with an understanding of the material and discursive practices of museums, memorials, and archives in constructing narratives of cultural identity. Focusing on the curatorial processes of material objects and the discourses they shape, produce, and manage about American identity, history, and culture, this course blends hands-on and theoretical approaches and provides students with knowledge of Museum Studies in 20th and 21st century America.

AM 260X 001 Postwar Hollywood

Tuesday, 6:30-9:30 Screenings Monday, 6:30-9:30 Claudia Calhoun, 4 credits

This course covers Hollywood (film and television) and American culture from the end of World War II through the mid-1960s. In this period, the “golden age” of Hollywood moviemaking ended when the all-powerful studio system broke apart. At the same time, the “golden age” of television dawned, as the new medium took its place at the center of American homes and American life.

The U.S. was changing, too: After World War II, America demobilized, suburbanized, and domesticated; the nation emerged as a global superpower and entered into a Cold War; and the country was internally divided over citizens’ claims on civil rights. Looking at Hollywood film and U.S. history together, we will see how they enlighten each other – and I expect we will enlighten ourselves, as well.

AM 260I 001 Pop History

WF 10:10-11:30 Greg Pfitzer, 4 credits

A topical examination of the creation, dissemination, and consumption of "pop"ular history in American culture. The course will examine the ways in which Americans absorb history through vernacular forms of communication, including radio dramatizations (*The Calvalcade of America*); cartoons and comic books (*Classics Illustrated*); television programs (*Time Tunnel* and *Drunk History*); movies (Disney's *Pocahontas*); and living history demonstrations (Civil War re-enactments). The interrelationships among popular, elite and folk history will be explored. **Note(s):** (Fulfills social science requirement.)

AM 260J 001 Diversity in the United States

MW 2:30-3:50 Amber Wiley

An examination of the ways in which people in the United States try to reconcile the realities of cultural difference with preconceived notions of a unified America and American identity. Students will learn about the United States as a complex, heterogeneous society that has been profoundly shaped by both the connections and conflict implicit in its multicultural heritage. Students will also address interrelationships and tensions that characterize a culturally diverse democracy by examining how accepted cultural traditions intersect with contested themes such as race, the family, adoption, gender, sexuality, and education.

Note(s): (Fulfills social sciences requirement; designated as a Cultural Diversity course.)

AM 360C 001 The 1960s

M W 4:00-5:50 Gregory Pfitzer, 4 credits

An interdisciplinary analysis of the decade of the 1960s in America. Using a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, including fiction, film, music, biography, autobiography, poetry, sociology, drama, and social criticism, the course explores the distinctive culture of this decade. It focuses on the ways different groups of Americans experienced the period, studying conformity and consumerism, the beatniks, rock and roll, and the silent generation, as well as the roots of the protest movements and the counterculture of the 1960s.

AM 376 001 AMERICA-POST-SEPTEMBER 11

MW 6:30-9:30 Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas, 3 credits

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 stand as the defining moment for United States foreign policy and, perhaps more generally, United States culture in the past decade. This course will examine the history of the post-September 11th period, asking both what the domestic and foreign policy responses to the attacks have been, how Americans engaged with those events and policies, and how they have been represented in popular culture. As we do so, we will read primary documents from the period, the best recent scholarship, and a range of popular texts that includes graphic novels, long-form journalism, film, and memorials. Our discussions will take seriously the premise that cultural texts do not simply reflect already-extant cultural ideas but rather play a critical role in the production of competing ideas about events, their cultural significance, and their political import. Our goal will be to analyze not only the events of September 11 and the United States' political, military, and cultural response to them but also how those events and responses are significant within larger debates about race, gender, citizenship, and patriotism in the contemporary United States as well as questions about the United States' role in global affairs. Each week, our focus will be on thoroughly examining key thematic topics central to post-9/11 culture. Among the topics we will discuss are: security and civil liberties, torture and detention, racial profiling, veterans' experiences, imperialism, memory and trauma, foreign policy and military strategy, drones, gender and sexuality.

AM 376X Reading the Wire

WF 12:20-1:40 screening Th 7:00-9:15 Daniel Nathan, 4 credit

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.