

# AMST 2103: Introduction to American Studies

Fall 2019

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This course provides an introduction to the interdisciplinary study of American culture. Although broadly chronological in design, it does not offer a general overview of American culture since the founding of the republic. Instead, this course takes a more thematic approach, focusing on the ways artists, political leaders, and ordinary Americans have responded to moments of political crisis and social change.

Students will spend the first few weeks of class assembling an American Studies “toolkit”—a set of basic concepts and theories that we can apply to a wide array of cultural artifacts and social practices. The rest of the semester will be devoted to analyzing three important developments in U.S. cultural history: the development of American popular culture, Americans’ responses to the Cold War, and the role that political polarization, particularly presidential elections, has played in American culture. To accomplish this, we will utilize a number of primary sources, including films, popular music, photographic images, and historical documents.

Ultimately, this course has two primary goals: **first**, to familiarize students with some of the ideas, methodologies, and questions central to the field of American Studies; and **second**, to provide students with the tools to think and write critically about American culture, past and present.

## Required Readings:

John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*  
Joseph Cummins, *Anything for a Vote: Dirty Tricks, Cheap Shots and October Surprises*