



**AMST 5007 Fall 2013\***  
**Contemporary America**  
M 6pm-9pm, F226

**Instructor:** Dr. Kristin J. Jacobson

**Office phone:** (609) 626-5581

**Email:** Please use our Blackboard email

**Office Hours:** Mondays & Wednesdays 1:30pm-3pm & by appointment

**Office Location:** F243

**Mailbox:** Arts and Humanities, K150

**Course Description:** The contemporary moment has been described and defined in a variety of ways, including "modern," "postmodern," "postcolonial," and "post-postmodern." Theorists and artists depict the period from 1945 to the present as an age defined by late capitalism (Frederic Jameson), skepticism (C.L.R. James), and globalization (Noam Chomsky) as well as an era characterized by a society of the spectacle (Guy Debord), neo-expressionism (Ida Applebroog), neoliberalism (David Harvey, Lisa Duggan), and environmental crisis (Timothy Morton, Ursula K. Heise).

This course addresses the period broadly and variously defined as "contemporary America." The course asks students to engage with a range of primary (literature, film, music, art) and secondary (history, theory, cultural studies) texts in order to explore the ways in which the contemporary moment has been and is being defined. Secondary texts frame our readings of the primary texts. Additionally, in defining this period, the course practices what the contemporary moment itself enacts: an outline of the period that interrogates its own definition.

Students may miss no more than 2 classes without penalty.

This course has two essential goals:

- *Develop skills in expressing oneself orally and in writing*
  - All written and oral presentation assignments give students practice in these skills.
- *Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view*
  - Our class discussions will prepare you to perform this skill in your formal written and oral presentation work.

**Accommodation for Students with Special Needs:** The Richard Stockton College complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with documented disabilities who seek accommodations should make their request by contacting the Learning Access Program located in J204 or by calling 609-652-4988. In order to make sure that there is enough time to arrange accommodations, submit the paperwork to the instructor by the end of the second week of the semester or as early as possible to arrange services in this class. Retroactive accommodations will not be granted.

Concerned that you have a disability that will affect your learning in this class, but don't know where to start? Contact Robert Ross, Carol Quinn, or Fran Bottone in the Learning Access Program (J204; 609-652-4988) to learn about your options and the available resources for having your disability assessed. Additional information on the program may be obtained from Stockton website: <http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/page.cfm?siteID=61&pageID=5>

**Academic Honesty:** Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions and risk failing the course. Other sanctions may also apply and all cases will be reported to Academic Affairs. You are responsible for knowing this college policy:

<http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/page.cfm?siteID=14&pageID=62>. Contact your instructor if you have questions.



Awol Erizku, "Girl with a Bamboo Earring," 2009

\* Image Sources: <http://theblogaday.com/2012/10/american-contemporary-art> & [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/26/black-artists-under-40-contemporary-painters-sculptors-performance-race-representation-art\\_n\\_2725639.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/26/black-artists-under-40-contemporary-painters-sculptors-performance-race-representation-art_n_2725639.html)

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**Required Texts:**

- *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*. Karen Tei Yamashita
- *White Noise*. Don DeLillo
- *Erasure*. Percival Everett
- *Girls to the Front*. Sara Marcus
- *Under the Feet of Jesus*. Helena Maria Viramontes
- *Age of Fracture*. Daniel T. Rodgers
- **Blackboard:** Electronic Readings—noted as (BB) on the syllabus—and all course materials are available in Blackboard. If you have questions about using Blackboard, consult a lab assistant or your instructor.

**Recommended Texts:**

- **MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition**
  - ***Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms***
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**Email and Office Hours:** Please use Blackboard email for all course-related correspondence. I usually check email every day in the morning. While I often check for messages more frequently and respond immediately, allow a twenty-four hour time frame for my reply. Always visit my office hours with specific questions about course material. If you were absent, contact a classmate with questions about missed material and then visit office hours or schedule an appointment if you still have questions. Visit instructor office hours or schedule an appointment to discuss grades. No grades will be discussed via email, including final grades.

Think of my office as an extension of the classroom and use my office hours and scheduled appointments to discuss any aspect of the reading and material covered during class: come chat with me about class projects, writing, questions about the reading, lecture, or discussion, ideas you wish to develop, reading and interpretive strategies you'd like to try, thesis ideas, and so on.

**Course Requirements:** In this course, expect to:

- (1) **Attend class:** you are allotted 2 absences without penalty for fatigue, illness, cocktail flu, personal reasons, malfunctioning clocks, doctor's appointments, work/family conflicts, etc. Note: I do not distinguish between excused or unexcused absences. If you miss two days and then get the flu and miss another day, you will lose 50 points (1/2 letter grade) for the third absence. **Students entering class after the instructor records attendance, who leave before class ends, or who disappear for a substantial part of any class will be considered absent.** Students that miss 4 classes will automatically earn a "D" for the class. Students that miss 5 or more classes will automatically earn an "F" for the class. Regular, spirited class attendance is a crucial component to passing this course. I will not give incompletes at the end of the semester unless arrangements are made well in advance and you have the appropriate reasons outlined by College policy;
- (2) **Attend class meetings prepared:** this means bring the appropriate text(s) and DO THE READING WITH GUSTO. Unless otherwise indicated, there will be a reading assignment for every class. Expect to devote a minimum of ten hours per week completing the reading, research, and writing. All students are expected to do the assigned reading for every class, prior to class, as preparation for class discussions. We will be very text-based in our approach to this material, and you should have access to the assigned reading. **Prepare at least one discussion topic, passage to discuss, or question for each class period;**
- (3) **Discuss and Listen Actively:** I expect class to be highly participatory, with everyone contributing comments, questions, and insights based on the assigned readings and interpreted through prior and emerging knowledge and experience. I will generally lead discussion at the beginning of the semester and will gradually turn over responsibility to students as the semester progresses;
- (4) **Complete all assignments:** Passing the course requires timely completion of ALL assignments, long and short, in-class and out-of-class. No late/incomplete assignments will be accepted after the last day of class;
- (5) **Unplug:** Silence cell phones, cease text messaging, and do not check email during class. An inability to use technology appropriately will negatively impact your final grade. All disruptive behavior (e.g., sleeping in class, inappropriate language directed at students/instructor, perpetual lateness, etc.) constitutes grounds for grade reduction and/or dismissal from class.

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**Grades**

• Period Papers (10 weekly, 50 points each, 2 typed pages each)	<b>500</b>
• Research Presentation with Visual Aid (15-20 mins)	<b>100</b>
• Final Research Paper/Project (15-20 pages)	<b>400</b>
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	<b>Total    1000</b>

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**Grading Scale**

100-95: A	89.9-87: B+	79.9-77: C+	69.9-67: D+
94.9-90: A-	86.9-83: B	76.9-73: C	66.9-63: D
	82.9-80: B-	72.9-70: C-	62.9-60: D-
			59.9 & below: F

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**Assignments**

**Period Papers** (10 two page typed papers; 50 points each; 500 points total): Period papers synthesize the day's assigned reading to craft an argument characterizing what the reading reveals about contemporary American culture. The aim of these brief—two page typed—papers is to capture how the assigned reading defines the period. Support this synthesis by including concrete examples/support from the reading in your paper. The papers may also offer evidence—drawing from outside or other class examples—that further supports or refutes the assigned reading's characterization. There are eleven period paper opportunities. Lowest score dropped.

**Research Presentation** (15-20 minutes, 100 points): The final two weeks of class are set aside for presentations of the final research paper/project. See Final Research Paper/Project Assignment Description for more information.

**Final Research Paper** (15-20 pages, 400 points): The capstone project of this class. This paper or project will represent your best work on a topic related to characterizing contemporary America. See Final Research Paper/Project Assignment Description for more information.

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**Late Assignment and Revision Policy:**

I understand that life is full of surprises and sometimes those surprises influence your coursework and your ability to complete assignments. As a community of learners, we also recognize that we have a responsibility to the group, to our instructor, and to ourselves. We understand that every action has a consequence—even when circumstance may limit our power to act. To balance individual and community needs, we have the following guidelines for late assignments.

**Written Assignments:** *Papers are due at the beginning of class.* Late papers will be docked 5 percentage points per day late. So, if an A (95%) paper due on Monday at 6pm is passed in on Tuesday at 8:30am, the recorded grade would be A- (90%). If it is passed in on Wednesday, the paper would earn a 85%. And so on and so forth.

**Paper Extensions:** Any student who asks the instructor **prior to** the due date may receive a 2-day extension from the due date listed on the syllabus. After 2 days the late paper penalty will go into effect. No exceptions. *Due to the College's grade submission deadline for graduating students, no graduating student may receive an extension for the final paper.*

Of course, the extension policy will only help students who have drafted a paper and follow the expected practice of backing up documents. Back up all your files and you will be a much happier and successful individual. You may not be happy when your computer explodes or disk crashes, but at least you will not be despondent. I also strongly encourage all students to keep a personal copy of every assignment and to keep all returned assignments with my feedback until the end of the term. **No assignments will be accepted after the last class meeting.**

**Paper Revisions:** This course is based on the principle that revisions take place **before** the instructor evaluates a paper for a grade. To this end, consider dropping in during office hours or other arranged meetings to discuss your papers in advance of due dates. Drop in at any stage of the writing process: from your initial brainstorming to nailing down those final brass tacks. I will happily read and comment on thesis statements (usually between 1-3 sentences) via Blackboard email. If you want me to read longer drafts, drop by my office hours or schedule an appointment.

## Syllabus—AMST 5007—Fall 2013<sup>2</sup>

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### Week 1 Introduction to course and *Blade Runner* screening

**Sept 9:** Introduction to course, assignments, students and instructor. Watch *Blade Runner* (Director's Cut).

Sept. 12: MAAS Meet and Greet, Campus Center Board of Trustees Room, 4:30-6pm.

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### Week 2 *Age of Fracture*

**Sept 16:** *Age of Fracture* (Prologue-Epilogue, 1-271; focus on Prologue-Chapter 2). Hungerford "On the Period Formerly Known as Contemporary" (BB). Douglas "Periodizing the American Century" (BB). Browse art by Thomas Doyle (<http://www.thomasdoyle.net/>). **Period Paper 1.**

**Questions to consider:** How do the various texts define the contemporary period? What do these definitions have in common and how are they different? What areas of contemporary life are missing? What areas are emphasized? How do these characterizations fit with your own definition of contemporary American culture? Do other disciplines define contemporary culture differently? How does one's position (age, gender, academic home, race, class, sexuality, etc.) influence the tools and methods used to characterize a period? In what ways does *Blade Runner* support or refute these definitions?

Sept. 18: 2013 Constitution Day Lecture, Jose Antonio Vargas, 6-8pm, Campus Center Event Room

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### Week 3 *Age of Simulation and Hyperrealism*

**Sept 23:** *White Noise* (Chapters 1-21; 1-163). Baudrillard "Simulacra and Simulations" (BB). Ghashmari "Living in a Simulacrum" (BB). Browse art by Duane Hansen ([https://www.google.com/search?q=Duane+Hanson&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=Don&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&prmd=imvns&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=vaaEUJrqCO220QH5voC4Cw&ved=0CAoQ\\_AUoAQ&biw=1080&bih=515](https://www.google.com/search?q=Duane+Hanson&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=Don&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&prmd=imvns&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=vaaEUJrqCO220QH5voC4Cw&ved=0CAoQ_AUoAQ&biw=1080&bih=515)). **Period Paper 2.**

**Questions to consider:** How are the essays, artwork, and novel in conversation with each other? In what ways do they seem to be having different conversations? How do these work characterize contemporary America? Can you think of any additional examples or theories that support or refute their definitions? In what ways is *White Noise* a dated novel? In what ways is it still very contemporary?

Sept 26: *Prince among Slaves* Film & Discussion, Campus Theater, 6-8pm.

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### Week 4 *Age of Postmodernity and Globalization*

**Sept 30:** *White Noise* (Chapters 22-40; 164-326). Wiese "Rethinking Postmodern Narrativity" (BB). Peysner "Globalization in America" (BB). **Period Paper 3.**

**Questions to consider:** What does the term postmodern mean? What does globalization mean? Why are these term key to understanding contemporary America? Are they key for understanding other time periods and places? What, if anything, makes American postmodernism and/or American globalization unique?

Oct. 1: Carla Kaplan, Title TBA, L-112, 6-8pm. Informal Meeting with Dr. Kaplan, 4:30-5:30, Location TBA.

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### Week 5 *Age of Neoliberalism*

**Oct 7:** *Under the Feet of Jesus* (Chapters 1-2; 1-90). Michaels "Plots Against America" (BB). Review *Age of Fracture* (Chapter 3, 77-110). **Period Paper 4.**

Oct 10 *Freeheld* Screening & Post-Film Discussion, Campus Center Theatre, 6-8pm.

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### Week 6 *Age of Citizenship Wars*

**Oct 14:** *Under the Feet of Jesus* (Chapters 3-5; 91-176). Shea "Don't Let Them Make You" (BB). Fiskio "Unsettling Ecocriticism" (BB). Browse "Migrating Identities" exhibit: <http://www.ybca.org/migrating-identities>; watch video: <http://youtu.be/hrM4nmlBMoM>. **Period Paper 5.**

Oct. 17: *Freedom Riders* Screening & Post-Film Discussion, Campus Center Theater, 6-8pm.

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<sup>2</sup> Class Schedule subject to changes with notice. Readings and assignments are listed on the day they are due.

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**Week 7 Age of Authenticity**

**Oct 21:** *Erasure* (1-131). Sanchez-Arce "Authenticism" (BB). Review *Age of Fracture* (Chapter 4, 111-143). **Period Paper 6.**

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**Week 8 Deconstructive Age**

**Oct 28:** *Erasure* (Chapter 7-18; 132-265). Eaton "Deconstructing the Narrative" (BB). Powell "Lord of Allusions" (BB). **Period Paper 7.**

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**Week 9 Age of Grrrl Power**

**Nov 4:** *Girls to the Front* (Author's Note-Postscript; 1-330). Rosenberg & Garofalo "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from Within" (BB). Review *Age of Fracture* (Chapter 5, 144-179). **Period Paper 8.**

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**Week 10 Terror and the Postmodern Age**

**Nov 11:** *Flight* (Chapters 1-21; 1-181). Daylight "The Language of Postmodern Space" (BB). Morris "Running the 'Medicine Line'" (BB). Salaita "Concocting Terrorism off the Reservation" (BB). Review *Age of Fracture* (Chapter 6, 180-220). **Period Paper 9.**

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**Week 11 Age of Transnationalism**

**Nov 18:** *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (Parts 1-3; 1-102). Review *Age of Fracture* (Chapter 7 and Epilogue, 221-271). Bahng, "Extrapolating Transnational Arcs" (BB). **Period Paper 10.**

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**Week 12 Age of Environmental Destruction**

**Nov 25:** *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (Parts 4-6; 103-211). Heise "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies" (BB). Simal "The Junkyard in the Jungle" (BB). **Period Paper 11.**

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**Week 13 Presentations and Completing Final Project/Paper**

**Dec 2:** Research Presentations.

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**Week 14 Presentations and Final Project/Paper**

**Dec 9:** Research Presentations. **Final Paper/Project Due.**



Wayne Eagleboy, "We-the people," acryl & barbed wire on buffalo skin, 1971