

**Syllabus for HST 429**  
**Topics in U.S. Cultural History:**  
**American Views of Sub-Saharan Africa**  
**Winter 2017, Fully Online**

Instructor: David Peterson del Mar

Office: 492-C CH Office Hours: Mondays 1:30–3:30, Thursdays 10:00-Noon

e-mail: [delmard@pdx.edu](mailto:delmard@pdx.edu)

[Instructor's website](#)   [Instructor's blog](#)

**Course Description**

This four-credit course will survey the history of U.S. views of Africa since World War II. We shall focus on relatively sophisticated sources, particularly memoirs and fiction. Much of the course work will be accomplished over the internet, so regular access to a computer with a reliable internet connection is critical to your success.

**Please note that the course entails reading and viewing some material that is highly racist and violent.**

**Course Objectives**

- 1) To demonstrate knowledge of U.S. views of Africa
- 2) To evaluate and analyze primary and secondary sources
- 3) To demonstrate an appreciation of multiple historical perspectives
- 4) To make scholarly arguments which address a range of perspectives and show original and independent thinking
- 5) To support arguments with multiple pieces of evidence
- 6) To engage collaboratively in critical thinking
- 7) To write clearly and logically

**Assessment**

5 Short Essays/Critiques      40%

5 longer essays                      60%

Extra Credit                              Up to 5 points

Scale: 93%-100% is an A; 90-92.9 is an A-; 87-89.99 is a B+; 83-86.99 is a B; and so forth. Your final grade is determined by the sum up your points for the above assignments. Grades (and feedback) for each assignment are sent to students via d2l and posted on the site's grade book.

**Required Texts** (Buy at PSU Bookstore, copies on reserve at PSU Library.)

Curtis Keim, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

Maria Thomas, *Come to Africa and Save Your Marriage*.

George Packer, *The Village of Waiting*.

Sidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.

## **Course Schedule**

Note: All discussion answers and short essays must be posted in by the end of Saturday of a given week. The replies and critiques must be posted by Sunday. The longer essays are also due by the end of Sunday.

### **Week #1**

(Short Essay due January 14, Critique January 15)

Assigned: Video on what history is good for (on site); Keim book, entire.

Short (up to 500 words) Essay/Critique #1: Use Keim's book to identify the single most powerful stereotype about Africa. (Remember to post one critique, also.)

### **Week #2**

(Longer Essay due January 22)

Assigned: Videos on Yo Ghana!'s [Resources section](#); [Guardian article](#) (2013) on African photography; "Blood Diamond" film (2006, widely available for rent or through Netflix); ["Sometimes in April" film](#) (2005).

Longer Essay #1: Use the assigned course materials for weeks #1 and #2 to write an essay of up to 1,000 words on this question: What difference does it make who creates images of Africa? How do images created by people from Africa (and of African descent) differ from those created by white Westerners?

### **Week #3**

(Short Essay due January 28, Critique January 29)

Assigned: ["Tarzan of the Apes" \(1918\)](#); ["Tarzan the Fearless" \(1933\)](#); and ["The Snows of Kilimanjaro" \(1952\)](#).

Short (up to 500 words) Essay/Critique #2: Do the three films suggest that American views of Africa changed much from 1918 to 1952? (Remember to post one critique, also.)

### **Week #4**

(Longer Essay due February 5)

Assigned: *LIFE* articles ([October 13, 1961 issue](#)); [Peter Beard article](#) (2012).

Longer Essay #2: Use the assigned course materials up to this point to write an essay of up to 1,000 words on this question: Did *LIFE* and Peter Beard perpetuate earlier (pre-1960) American stereotypes of Africa? How and how not?

### **Week #5**

(Short Essay due February 11, Critique February 12)

Assigned: David Peterson del Mar, "At the Heart of Things," *African Identities*, 2011 (search using the [PSU Library](#); [selection of writings by](#)

[Peace Corps Volunteers in Africa](#) (pick out some material from African countries listed in the "Articles about PC Countries" section on the right-hand side of the website).

Short (up to 500 words) Essay/Critique #3: To what extent did Peace Corps Volunteers constitute a radical departure from how Americans had viewed Africa? (Remember to post a critique, also.)

### **Week #6**

(Longer Essay due February 19)

Assigned: Packer, entire.

Essay #3: Use the assigned course materials up to this point to write an essay of up to 1,000 words on this question: How does Packer's time in Togo change his view of life?

### **Week #7**

(Shorter Essay due February 25, Critique February 26)

Assigned: Watch "[Run for Congo Women](#),"; Lisa Shannon, "[A Thousand Sisters](#),"; [Katie Davis ministry in Uganda video](#).

Short (up to 500 words) Essay/Critique #4: How and why have these women react differently to Africa from how Packer did? (Remember to post a critique, also.)

### **Week #8**

(Longer Essay due March 5)

Assigned: Thomas, entire.

Essay #4: Use the assigned course materials up to this point to write an essay of up to 1,000 words on this question: What is the central point or points of Thomas's fiction?

### **Week #9**

(Shorter Essay due March 11, Critique March 12)

Assigned: Marcus Garvey, "[Back to Africa](#)" (1921); "[Langston Hughes and Africa](#)"; *Ebony Magazine*, [August 1976](#); "The Language You Cry In," 1998 (log into the PSU Library and search for it); Lydia Polgreen, "[Ghana's Uneasy Embrace of Slavery's Diaspora](#)" (2005).

Short (up to 500 words) Essay/Critique #5: How have African-American views of Africa changed over the past century? (Remember to post a critique, also.)

### **Week #10**

(Longer Essay due March 19)

Assigned: Hartmann, entire;

Essay #4: Use the assigned course materials up to this point to write an essay of up to 1,000 words on this question: What has most attracted African Americans to Africa, and have they found what they hoped to find?

## **Assignments**

### **Short Essays/Critiques**

The five short essays/critiques are worth forty (40%) percent of your course mark. The answers should be no more than 500 words in length. The answers are due by the end of Saturdays, the critiques by the end of Sundays. Please see the grading rubrics, below, for the instructor's expectations, as they are quite specific. The answers are worth 2/3s of the grade, the critiques 1/3. Please try to critique answers that have not yet been critiqued. The instructor will send his feedback through personal d2l mail.

### **Longer Essays**

These essays are the most important and heavily-weighted elements of the course. Please see the grading rubric, below, for the instructor's expectations. Do not exceed 1,000 words for the longer essays. All of your essays should focus on the assigned reading. Submit these essays via the website's drop box, which is where I'll post my feedback. They are due by the end of Sundays. The instructor will send his feedback through the drop box.

### **Extra-Credit Discussions**

Each week there will be an optional discussion available. You can post on any aspects of the readings that you would like—and respond to the posts of others. If you make a meaningful contribution to the discussion (go beyond the obvious), I'll give you an extra .25 points. If you make an exceptional contribution to the discussion, I'll give you an extra .5 points. The maximum amount of extra credit that anyone can receive during the term, then, is 5 points. You must post by the end of Saturday each week to receive extra credit, and there are no extensions for extra credit.

### **Providing Context/References**

Unlike many history courses, which require a mastery of the Chicago Manual of Style method of notation, for this course you need only to place the author's name and page number in parentheses after a quotation. But in the text you should also provide context for the quotation. Here is an example: "We have never had minority problems here," wrote a Los

Angeles woman in 1964, “until the red agitators, minority bosses, and self-interested politicians commenced to stir up ill will” (Nicolaides, 311-312). If you use any outside sources (which is not encouraged), please list the book’s author, title, place of publication, publisher, and date of publication at the end of your essay.

### **Grading Rubrics**

#### Short Essay Rubric

This table describes the characteristics of an excellent, good, average, poor, and very poor short essay.

<b>Area</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
Clarity of Prose (20%)	Clear and concise	Clear but at times wordy	Generally clear, often repetitive	Hard to understand, very repetitive	Very hard to follow
Focus (20%)	The thesis, topic sentences, and evidence are aligned with each other and address the question	The thesis answers the question, the topic sentences and most of the evidence support the thesis	The topic sentences and evidence support aspects of the thesis	The argument is vague or inconsistent, the essay diffuse	The essay seems unrelated to the question
Evidence (60%)	There are 6 pieces or more of evidence (paraphrased or quoted) and they are placed in context (such as date,	There are 4-5 pieces of evidence and they are placed in context	There are 2-3 pieces of evidence, usually without context	There is an example with little if any context,	What evidence?

	speaker, place)				
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### Long Essay Rubric

This table describes the characteristics of an excellent, good, average, poor, and very poor long essay.

<b>Area</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
Clarity of Prose (15%)	Clear and concise	Clear but at times wordy	Generally clear, often repetitive	Hard to understand, very repetitive	Very hard to follow
Focus (15%)	The thesis, topic sentences, and evidence are aligned with each other and address the question	The thesis answers the question, and the topic sentences and most of the evidence support the thesis	The topic sentences and evidence support aspects of the thesis	The argument is vague or inconsistent, the essay diffuse	The essay seems unrelated to the question
Evidence (50%)	There are 4 pieces or more of evidence (paraphrased or quoted) per (roughly 150-word) paragraph, and they are placed	There are 2-3 pieces of evidence per paragraph, and they are usually placed in context	There are 1-2 pieces of evidence, usually without context, per paragraph	Most of the paragraphs lack evidence, and little context is provided for it	There are only 1-2 pieces of evidence in the entire essay or none at all

	in context (such as date, speaker, place)				
Analysis (30%)	The essay is sensitive to multiple arguments and shows originality of thought	The essay acknowledges that there is more than one good way to answer the question and shows some independent thought	The essay answers the question but is not sensitive to complexity	The essay speaks to the question's general topic without really answering the question	The essay does not answer the question

### Critique Rubric

This table describes the characteristics of an excellent, good, average, poor, and very poor critique.

Area	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Balance (35%)	The critique identifies the essay's strengths and weaknesses	The critique is strong on weaknesses but thin on strengths	The critique is strong on strengths but thin on weaknesses	The critique does not much address the essay weaknesses	The critique does not address the essay
Breadth and Specificity (65%)	The critique addresses all three categories by identifying 2 or more specific	The critique addresses 1-2 specific strengths or weaknesses	The critique addresses 1 specific strength or weaknesses in each category	The critique addresses 1-2 categories	The critique does not address the essay

	strengths or weaknesses in each of the 3 categories (thesis, topic sentences, evidence)	in all three categories			
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**Critical Thinking Defined:**

The ability to explore many perspectives, interpretations, and pieces of evidence before forming a nuanced conclusion.

**Late Policies**

I am liberal with extensions if they are requested before the due date—although I realize that there are occasions in which that is not possible. E-mail me if you would like me to consider granting you a retro-active extension. I am reluctant to grant more than two extensions per term.

If you do not request an extension before an assignment is due or persuade me that you should have a retroactive extension, even work that is just a few minutes late will receive no credit, with this exception: longer essays turned in within twenty-four hours past the due date will receive half credit.

All assignments must be turned in by the day and time of the final assignment. Requests for the grade of incomplete must be received by the day and time of the last assignment, and such requests will not necessarily be granted. Students must have completed at least half of the work for the course to receive an incomplete. If you are unable to keep up with the work of the course during the first half of the term, you should drop the course as soon as possible.

**Online Etiquette**

Please do your best to:

1. Take issue with each other’s ideas, not each other—stay respectful;
2. Not take criticism of your work personally; we are all trying to help each other improve, and that requires honest feedback;
3. Realize and accept that we come from diverse backgrounds, including age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political and religious beliefs, and experiences.

4. Be open to changing your mind.

### **Plagiarism**

It is cheating to pass off the work of others as your own. This includes using the words of scholars without attribution (be sure to use quotation marks and indicating the source of the words) and using the words of your fellow students. Your instructor takes such violations of the ethical code very seriously and will penalize violators as severely as the university allows. Consequences can include failing the class and having the violation noted on your permanent university record.

### **Accessibility**

It is Portland State University's goal that learning experiences be as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, please register with the [Disability Resource Center](#) (DRC) (503-725-4150 or [drc@pdx.edu](mailto:drc@pdx.edu)) in order to establish reasonable accommodations. Once you have registered with the DRC, please schedule a time to talk to me so that we can discuss your needs for the term. **Discrimination**

### **Discrimination**

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment for my students and for the campus as a whole. Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment, sexual violence or discrimination to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find [a list](#) of those individuals. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module [Creating a Safe Campus](#) in your D2L.