

**HON-494/MAS-598**  
**VITAL SIGNS: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF BLOOD**

**Professor Monica J. Casper**

Spring 2012

T/Th 1:30 – 2:45 PM, Sands 202

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Office hours: Thursday 11 AM – Noon, or by appointment

Office location: FAB N230-G

*“Blood never sleeps.”*

*Bill Hayes*



**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The purpose of this course is to explore and interpret blood in its many cultural and political dimensions. Not only is blood the elixir of human (and animal) life, without which we would certainly perish, the substance is also metaphorically and historically rich. It circulates through and animates our bodies *and* our social lives; indeed, it is essential to what (and who) counts as a human being. For example, blood figures prominently in ideas about contagion, especially since the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, and in the long history of diseases such as malaria and sickle cell anemia. Aphorisms such as “blood is thicker than water” signal the importance of biology, family, genealogy, and genetics. Blood is made to stand in for race and ethnicity, and has a particularly dubious history in the context of eugenics. It is also deeply gendered, for example in relation to women’s menstrual cycles and cultural beliefs about purity and pollution. Blood is also a vital ingredient and resource in health care, often heavily commercialized as in blood banks and biomedical research. And blood is represented in popular culture in manifold ways, from our current fascination with vampires to our love of forensic technology to the popularity of “slasher” and other violent films. Thus, blood is simultaneously substance, object, commodity, signifier, resource, fetish, component, and plot device. Alongside concrete knowledge about blood and its varied meanings, students will also explore important theoretical tools, such as cultural approaches to human bodies and body parts and theories from science and technology studies. Although our lens is focused quite specifically on blood in this course, we are interested in engaging broader ideas about the objects and meanings that constitute our social worlds. The reading and assignment load is challenging, consistent with a course cross-listed as HON and MAS.

## REQUIRED COURSE READINGS

Selected articles and other materials will be posted on Blackboard (designated BB in syllabus). In addition, you will be reading the following books:

- Carney, Scott. 2011. *The Red Market: On the Trail of the World's Organ Brokers, Bone Thieves, Blood Farmers, and Child Traffickers*. New York: William Morrow.
- Hayes, Bill. 2005. *Five Quarts: A Personal and Natural History of Blood*. New York: Random House.
- Nolen, Stephanie. 2008. *28: Stories of AIDS in Africa*. Walker & Company.
- Skloot, Rebecca. 2010. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Sontag, Susan. 2001. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador.
- Stein, Elissa and Susan Kim. 2009. *Flow: The Cultural Story of Menstruation*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Class Participation. You are required to be present and to participate in class discussions on a regular basis. Because the course is designed as an interactive seminar and not a lecture, active participation will greatly enhance your own comprehension and experience in class, as well as that of your classmates. Participation is worth 10% of your grade.
2. Discussion Board. Throughout the semester, there will be 5 discussion board forums on Blackboard, focused on topics related to the readings. You are required to post to each of these forums, dialoguing with your colleagues and me about the material. Each discussion is worth 6% of your grade (30% total). To receive full credit for each post, you must respond to the original question, as well as any follow-up questions posed by your classmates, in sufficient depth to indicate that you've read and are engaging with the material. When responding to posts, use people's names so that we know what issues/concerns you're following up on. Responses will be due within 48 hours after I post each question; after 48 hours, the forum will close and no new posts will be accepted, although the forum will still be visible.
3. Response/Reflection Papers. You are required to write three response papers during the semester, based on the course materials. These 2-3 page responses will represent your creative/critical engagements with the readings. In the responses, you may decide to take up a particular issue, contest an author's argument or position, offer critical analyses, or provide a critique of several materials at once. Each response paper will be worth 10% of your grade, toward 30% of your final grade. The papers must be typed, double-spaced, in a font no smaller than 12-point, and sent to me via email (as an attachment) rather than in hard copy. Also, the cardinal rule is that you cannot write about material we have already discussed in class; so do plan ahead. Response papers are due by noon on February 2, March 6, and April 10.
4. Visual Analysis/Presentation. Your final assignment in this course is to produce a visual analysis of a cultural object or image that has some connection to blood. You will respond to a set of analytical questions that I provide and also give a 5-minute presentation during our last class session. Objects may include, for example, artwork, media image, a doll or toy, an artifact, a test tube, a technology, a health care device, a quilt, a DNA sample, or anything else of your choosing. The object or image you choose should contain some meaning(s) related to blood, or signify blood in some fashion, and of course should not involve harm to any living creature. Your analytical task will be to explain the meanings behind the object/image, including what is being signified, for whom, for what purposes, and with what potential consequences. The questions (to be distributed later in the semester) will focus your analysis more specifically. This assignment is due April 24 and will be worth 30% of your final grade.

## GRADING AND ASSIGNMENT STANDARDS

Class Participation	10%
Discussion Board Posts (5)	30%
Response Paper 1	10%
Response Paper 2	10%
Response Paper 3	10%
Visual Analysis/Presentation	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

### *Grading scale:*

99-100 % = A+	77-79 % = C+
93-98 % = A	70-76 % = C
90-92 % = A-	67-69 % = D+
87-89 % = B+	63-66 % = D
83-86 % = B	60-62 % = D-
80-82 % = B-	0-59 % = E

## LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please contact me to arrange an appointment as soon as possible. At the appointment, we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs, and explore potential accommodations. I rely on the Disability Resource Center (<http://www.west.asu.edu/drc/>) to assist me in verifying the need for accommodation and in developing appropriate strategies. If you have not previously contacted the DRC, I encourage you to do so as early in the semester as possible.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND COLLEGIALITY

Plagiarism is unacceptable and students are expected to abide by the ASU Student Code of Conduct (<http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/vp/safetyresources/index.htm#conduct>). You, the student, are responsible for authenticating any assignment in this course. If asked, you must be able to produce proof that the assignment you submit is actually your own work. I recommend that you engage in a verifiable working process on assignments. Keep digital copies of all drafts of your work, write brief summaries of research materials, keep logs or journals of your work on assignments and papers, learn to save different drafts or version of assignments under different names, etc.

Regarding collegiality, I consider the classroom to be a space for collaborative learning. That is, contrary to the idea that learning happens only inside somebody's head, learning also happens through our interactions and collective efforts. Following the tenets of critical pedagogy, I view teaching as the development of critical consciousness in my students. Teaching and learning are part of broader political struggles to create a more just and egalitarian society, beginning with the classroom. Rather than ascribing to a "top down" notion in which I talk at you, the passive recipient, I believe that all of us are mutually responsible for creating a productive, engaged learning environment. It goes without saying that you should be respectful toward your co-participants in this course.

## A BRIEF FACULTY BIO

I joined ASU's faculty in 2008 and am currently Professor of American Studies and Women and Gender Studies in the Division of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies (HArCS). My research and teaching interests include bodies and sexuality; feminist technoscience studies; medical sociology; gender, race, and class; women's health; environmental health and justice; cultural politics of reproduction; public health aspects of security and war; disability studies; trauma studies; and bioethics—in short, the biopolitics of *life itself*. I received my B.A. in sociology from the University of Chicago in 1988 and my Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California, San Francisco in 1995. I spent a year at Stanford University as a Fellow in

Biomedical Ethics and was on the sociology faculty at UC Santa Cruz for several years. In 2003, I served as Executive Director of the Intersex Society of North America, and from 2004-2008 I directed the Women's and Gender Studies Program at Vanderbilt University. I am co-author of *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility* (NYU Press, 2009), author of *The Making of the Unborn Patient: A Social Anatomy of Fetal Surgery* (Rutgers University Press, 1998) editor of *Synthetic Planet: Chemical Politics and the Hazards of Modern Life* (Routledge, 2003), and co-editor of *Corpus: An Interdisciplinary Reader on Bodies and Knowledge* (Palgrave 2011). My current research projects investigate varied topics: the biopolitics of infant mortality, the HPV vaccine for cervical cancer, permanent non-surgical sterilization technologies, traumatic brain injury, and parental child abduction.



## INTRODUCTION

January 5

Administrative Business  
Course Overview  
Questions

## THEORIES

January 10

Read:

Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell, 2006, *Tissue Economies*, "Introduction," on BB

Arjun Appadurai, 2006, "The Thing Itself," on BB

Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer, 1989, "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations,' and Boundary Objects," on BB

Monica J. Casper, 1994, "At the Margins of Humanity: Fetal Positions in Science and Medicine," on BB

January 12

Read:

Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore, 2009, *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility*, Chapter 1 (electronic resource available through the ASU Libraries)

Suzanne Fraser and Kylie Valentine, 2006, "Making Blood Flow?: Materializing Blood in Body Modification and Blood-borne Virus Protection," on BB

Richard Noll, 2006, "The Blood of the Insane," on BB

Michael Orsini, 2007, "Reframing Medical Injury? Viewing People with Hemophilia as Victims of Cultural Injustice," on BB



## REPRESENTATIONS

January 17

### Read:

Rosemary Deller, 2011, "Dead Meat: Feeding at the Anatomy Table of Gunther von Hagens' *Body Worlds*," on BB

Ali Brox, 2008, "Every Age Has the Vampire It Needs': Octavia Butler's Vampiric Vision in *Fledgling*," on BB

Helen Bailie, 2011, "Blood Ties: The Vampire Lover in the Popular Romance," on BB

Jo Haynes, 2010, "In the Blood: The Racializing Tones of Music Categorization," on BB

January 19

### In-Class Film Viewing

*Red Gold: The Epic Story of Blood*

"Magic to Medicine"

## RACE

January 24

### Read:

Ann Morning, 2011, *The Nature of Race*, Chapters 1 and 2 (electronic resource available through the ASU Libraries)

Allyson Polsky, 2002, "Blood, Race, and National Identity," on BB

Gísli Pálsson and Paul Rabinow, 2001, "The Icelandic Genome Debate," on BB

Jennifer Robertson, 2001, "Japan's First Cyborg? Miss Nippon, Eugenics, and Wartime Technologies of Beauty, Body and Blood," on BB



January 26

Read:

Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, pp. ix-11 and Part 1

January 31

Read:

Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Part 2

February 2

Read:

Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Part 3 and pp. 311-328

Due:

Response paper #1

February 7

Read:

National Congress of American Indians, 2006, "Resolution #SAC-06-019," on BB

Jana Bommersbach, 2008, "Arizona's Broken Arrow,"

<http://www.phoenixmag.com/lifestyle/200811/arizona-s-broken-arrow/>

Who Owns Your Body?, "Research Without Patient Consent,"

<http://www.whoownsyourbody.org/havasupai.html>

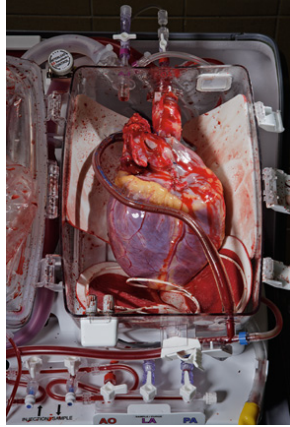
Amy Harmon, 2010, "Indian Tribe Wins Fight to Limit Research of Its DNA," link on BB

February 9

In-Class Film Viewing

*Red Gold: The Epic Story of Blood*

"Blood and War"



## CIRCULATION

February 14

Read:

Nancy Scheper-Hughes, 2001, "Commodity Fetishism in Organs Trafficking," on BB  
Donald G. McNeill, Jr., 2011, "Chimp to Man to History Books: The Path of AIDS," on BB  
Patrick Hahn, 2011, "The Vampire of the Caribbean,"  
[http://open.salon.com/blog/xylocopa/2011/11/29/the\\_vampire\\_of\\_the\\_caribbean](http://open.salon.com/blog/xylocopa/2011/11/29/the_vampire_of_the_caribbean)

February 16

Read:

Scott Carney, *The Red Market*, pp. xi-60

February 21

Read:

Scott Carney, *The Red Market*, pp. 61-152

February 23

Read:

Scott Carney, *The Red Market*, pp. 153-238

## CONTAGION

February 28

In-Class Film Viewing

*Red Gold: The Epic Story of Blood*  
"Tainted Blood"

March 1

Read:

Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*

March 6

Read:

Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*

Due:

Response paper #2



March 8

Read:

Stephanie Nolen, 28: *Stories of AIDS in Africa*, pp. 1-124

March 13

Read:

Stephanie Nolen, 28: *Stories of AIDS in Africa*, pp. 125-238

March 15

Read:

Stephanie Nolen, 28: *Stories of AIDS in Africa*, pp. 239-352

**GENDER**

March 27

Read:

Laura Mamo and Jennifer Fosket, 2009, "Scripting the Body: Pharmaceuticals and the (Re)Making of Menstruation," on BB

Roseann M. Mandziuk, 2011, "Ending Women's Greatest Hygienic Mistake': Modernity and the Mortification of Menstruation in Kotex Advertising, 1921-1926," on BB

In-Class Film Viewing

*Period Piece*, a film by Jennifer Frame and Jay Rosenblatt

See: [http://www.jayrosenblattfilms.com/period\\_piece.php](http://www.jayrosenblattfilms.com/period_piece.php)



March 29

Read:

Elissa Stein and Susan Kim, *Flow*, pp. ix-63

April 3

Read:

Elissa Stein and Susan Kim, *Flow*, pp. 65-143

April 5

Read:

Elissa Stein and Susan Kim, *Flow*, pp. 145-254

**LAB WORK**

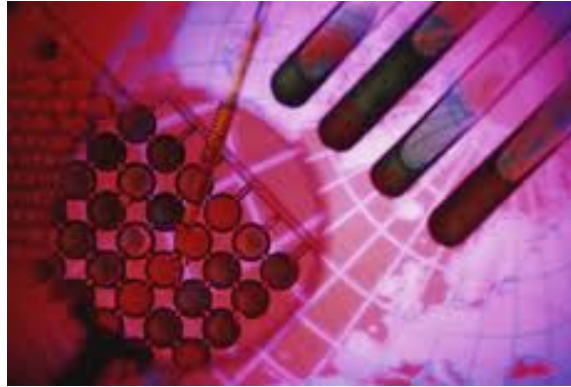
April 10

In-Class Film Viewing

*Red Gold: The Epic Story of Blood*  
“New Blood”

Due:

Response paper #3



April 12

Tour of Dr. Todd Sandrin's lab, CLCC-311

See: <https://sites.google.com/a/asu.edu/sandrin-lab/Home>

**“LIFE”**

April 17

Read:

Bill Hayes, *Five Quarts*, Chapters 1-7

April 19

Read:

Bill Hayes, *Five Quarts*, Chapters 8-13

April 24

Presentations