

**Tuesday/Thursday 1:10-2:30 PM**  
**Scott Hall, Room 202 (College Avenue Campus)**

**Dr. Jamie Pietruska** <pietrusk@rci.rutgers.edu>  
**Office: 101D Van Dyck Hall**  
**Office hours: Tuesdays, 9:30-10:30 AM, Thursdays, 10:00 AM-12 PM (or by appointment)**

This syllabus and other course materials will be posted on Sakai.

<<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>>

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

How have Americans in the past reckoned with their futures? This course traces the history of future-oriented ideas and practices in the United States, focusing primarily on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will use primary sources and secondary historical accounts to examine changing ideas about the future, artistic representations of futuristic societies, and scientific and technological attempts to predict and control the future. The course is organized chronologically but will emphasize these recurring themes: how ideas about the future and attempts to anticipate and control it have changed over time; how knowledge of the future is produced and contested; how utopian and dystopian futures emerged from critiques of political economy at particular historical moments; how ideas about predictability and methods of forecasting have changed in response to industrialization; how innovations in science, technology, and business have been designed, often unsuccessfully, to rationalize future uncertainties; how politics of race, class and gender shape particular visions of the future; how ideologies of progress shape visions of the future that privilege certain social groups while excluding others; how the concept of the future has animated religious belief and scientific inquiry; how religious and scientific ways of knowing the future have overlapped and diverged; how literary, visual, and exhibition culture has reflected and shaped changing ideas about the future.

Specific topics will include religious prophecies, utopianism, fortune-telling, World's Fairs and the ideology of progress, scientific forecasting and the late-nineteenth-century rise of probabilistic thinking, risk and industrial accidents, commodity futures trading and business forecasting, eugenics and population control, futurism in architecture and painting, science fiction in literature and film, predictability models during the Cold War, 1970s futurism, environmentalism and climate control, and behavioral economics.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Understand changing ideas about and attempts to influence the future from the early nineteenth century to the present
2. Analyze how the concept of *the future* has changed over time
3. Examine how political and economic institutions, as well as social practices, have shaped the production of knowledge about the future
4. Examine how cultural meanings of the future have been produced in literary and visual art, exhibitions, and advertising
5. Analyze how ideologies of race, class, and gender have shaped and restricted visions of the future
6. Analyze and evaluate historical arguments in secondary sources
7. Understand recent historiographical trends in the fields of cultural history and the history of science and technology
8. Lead class discussion by introducing the assigned reading and posing questions to the class
9. Conduct original historical research based in primary sources
10. Write a formal analytical essay based on original historical research

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### *Attendance Policy*

Students are expected to attend all sessions and to be active and thoughtful participants in class discussion. More than three (3) unexcused absences (i.e., other than a documented illness, documented emergency, religious observance, or university-approved absence) will have an adverse effect on your grade. For each unexcused absence beyond the 3 allowed, your final course grade will be lowered by 2 percentage points. For example, if you accumulate 5 unexcused absences during the semester and have a grade of 88%, your grade will be lowered to 84%. Please note that an excused absence does not mean that you email me an excuse before class; an excused absence means that you provide me with a note from a doctor, dean, or coach that explains your absence. **All absences, whether excused or unexcused, should be entered into the new University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>**, where you will indicate the date and reason for your absence. I will receive an automatic email from this system, so there is no need to send me a separate email regarding your attendance.

Attendance involves not only physical presence, but also mental presence. This means that cell phone use is not permitted in class for any reason, and that laptops should be used for note-taking only. I consider each of you a valuable member of our shared intellectual community this semester, and I fully expect that you will conduct yourselves accordingly.

### *Assignments*

In addition to regular class attendance and participation, students will be required to write a short analytical essay (4-5 pages) and a longer original research paper (10-12 pages), as well as to write a take-home midterm essay exam (5 pages) and a take-home final essay exam (5 pages). Students will be required to informally lead discussion once during the semester by posing questions to the class to help our discussion get started. The reading assignments should be completed for the date on which they are listed. **You will need to bring your readings with you for every class meeting as we will often refer to specific passages during discussion.**

### Required Books (available at the Rutgers Bookstore and on reserve at Alexander Library)

Joseph J. Corn, ed., *Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology, and the American Future* (The MIT Press, 1988). ISBN: 978-0262530767

H. Bruce Franklin, ed., *Future Perfect: American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century—An Anthology* (Rutgers UP, 1995 [revised and expanded edition]). ISBN: 978-0813521527

Additional course readings will be available on Sakai.

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The foundation of this course and any scholarly endeavor is academic integrity. I fully expect that all students will adhere to principles of academic integrity in their work. All written work must be a student's own original work. (Collaboration on essay assignments is not permitted.) Any and all references to other sources within your own paper must be properly documented according to the guidelines in the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which is available at the Alexander Library.

You are responsible for understanding the Rutgers policies regarding academic integrity, as outlined here:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml>

Ignorance of these policies or the consequences for violations is not an acceptable excuse.

The Rutgers Writing Program has an excellent webpage that details some of the subtleties of plagiarism, which I urge you to read carefully:

<http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/plagiarism>

The Rutgers Libraries have produced an interactive online tutorial, which I also urge you to consult, that provides concrete examples of what is and what is not plagiarism:

<http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/intro.html>

Another valuable resource that you should consult is the Rutgers Libraries webpage that explains how to take careful reading notes so that you will not fall into the trap of unintentional plagiarism as you are writing:

[http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib\\_instruct/instruct\\_document.shtml](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml)

If you have any questions about quoting, paraphrasing, or referring to the work of others, please ask! It is better to be safe than sorry, better to have too many citations than not enough and thus run the risk of unintentional plagiarism.

**Any and all violations of academic integrity in this course will result in the formal consequences and disciplinary action that are outlined in the Rutgers policy on academic integrity. Please understand that I take academic integrity extremely seriously and have a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism or cheating of any kind.**

#### GRADING POLICIES

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- 15% Paper #1 (4-5 pages): Analytical essay based on primary sources  
(Specific assignment will be distributed as the course gets underway.)
- 20% Midterm exam: 1 take-home essay question (5 pages, based on course readings, lectures, and discussions)
- 40% Paper #2 (10-12 pages): Original historical research paper on a topic of your choosing, including interim submissions of topic, working bibliography, one best source, and introduction/outline. The paper itself will be worth 30%, and the interim submissions will be worth 10%. (Specific assignment will be distributed as the course gets underway.)
- 10% Class participation (5% general participation, 5% leading of class discussion)
- 15% Final exam: 1 take-home essay question (5 pages, based on course readings, lectures, and discussions)

**Please note that late paper submissions will be penalized by half a letter grade (e.g., from B+ to B) for each day they are late, unless you have obtained a letter from a doctor or a dean explaining why you were unable to complete your work on time.**

**Also, please be aware that I do not offer extra credit, nor do I grade on the curve. My philosophy is that students earn grades; I do not give them. But I also believe that it is part of my job to help you succeed—so please come to office hours or email me with any question, big or small. I am always happy to help all my students with the course material and with their writing.**

## SCHEDULE

### Introduction

Thurs 1 Sept: Introduction and course overview

### Week 1: Problems with Presentist and Historical Accounts of the Future

Tues 6 Sept

David J. Staley, "A History of the Future," *History and Theory* 41, no. 4 (December 2002): 72-89. [Available on Sakai]

Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), pp. 3-25 (Chapter 1: "Journey to Elsewhen"). [Available on Sakai]

Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007), pp. 135-164 (Chapter 10: "The Scandal of Prediction"). [Available on Sakai]

OPTIONAL: Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), pp. 155-172 (Chapter 9: "The Effect of Expectations"). [Available on Sakai]

Thurs 8 Sept: NO CLASS (Monday schedule)

### **Part I: Creating the Future in the Present**

#### Week 2: Worlds Beginning and Ending in Antebellum America

Tues 13 Sept Utopian and Literary Experiments with Perfectibility

Edward K. Spann, *Brotherly Tomorrows: Movements for a Cooperative Society in America, 1820-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 1-28 (Chapter 1: "The Challenge of the Century," Chapter 2: "The Prophet of New Lanark") [Available on Sakai].

William B. Meyer, "The Perfectionists and the Weather: The Oneida Community's Quest for Meteorological Utopia, 1848-1879," *Environmental History* 7, no. 4 (2002): 589-610. [Available on Sakai]

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Birthmark" [*Future Perfect*, pp. 23-38]

Thurs 15 Sept Religious Prophecies Unfulfilled

*The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), pp. 17-35, 209-226 (Chapter 2: "William Miller: Disappointed Prophet," Appendix I: "The Disappointment Remembered"). [Available on Sakai]

Week 3: "The Future Life" of American Spiritualism

Tues 20 Sept Spiritualism as Historicist or Futurist Epistemology?

**RESEARCH TOPIC STATEMENT DUE**

Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 17-65 (Chapter 1: "Mourning, Media, and the Cultural Politics of Conjuring the Dead"). [Available on Sakai]

Thurs 22 Sept Spiritual Uncertainties of War

Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), pp. 171-210 (Chapter 6: "Believing and Doubting: 'What Means this Carnage?'"). [Available on Sakai]

Edward Bellamy, "An Echo of Antietam" (1886) in *The Blindman's World, and Other Stories* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1898). [Available on Sakai]

Week 4: Prophecy, Profit, and Character in Antebellum America

Tues 27 Sept **Workshop: Conducting Historical Research**

**PAPER #1 DUE**

Thurs 29 Sept

Ann Fabian, *Card Sharps and Bucket Shops: Gambling in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), pp. 108-152 (Chapter 3: "Gambling on the Color Line"). [Available on Sakai]

Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006 [2005]), pp. 99-128 (Chapter 4: "Central Intelligence Agency, since 1841"). [Available on Sakai]

**Part II: Inventing Futures in the New Industrial Society**

Week 5: The Search for Order in Weather and Prices

Tues 4 Oct Producing Weather and Crop Forecasts

**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

James Rodger Fleming, "Storms, Strikes, and Surveillance: The U.S. Army Signal Office, 1861-1891," *Historical Studies in the Physical and Biological Sciences* 30, no. 2 (2000): 315-32. [Available on Sakai]

Emerson Hough, "Does the Weather Bureau Make Good?" *Everybody's Magazine*, May 1909, pp. 609-21. [Available on Sakai]

Thurs 6 Oct Theories of Cycles from Weather to Market  
Samuel Benner, *Benner's Prophecies of Future Ups and Downs in Prices* (Cincinnati, 1876), pp. 7-30 (Preface, Introduction, "Predictions"), pp. 96-131 ("Panic," "Theory," "Conclusions"). [Available on Sakai]

#### Week 6: Ideas about Unpredictability

Tues 11 Oct Risk and the Futures of People and Commodities  
Jonathan Ira Levy, "Contemplating Delivery: Futures Trading and the Problem of Commodity Exchange in the United States, 1875-1905," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 2 (2006): 307-335. [Available on Sakai]  
Jason Puskar, "William Dean Howells and the Insurance of the Real," *American Literary History* 18, no. 1 (2006): 29-58. [Available on Sakai]

Thurs 13 Oct Clearing a Space for Chance  
**ONE BEST SOURCE DUE**  
William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956 [1897]), pp. 145-183. [Available on Sakai]  
Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Penguin, 2003), pp. 147-186 (Chapter 4: "The Waning of Providence"). [Available on Sakai]

#### Week 7: Engineering the Future (1)

Tues 18 Oct  
Howard Segal, "The Technological Utopians" [*Imagining Tomorrow*, pp. 119-136]  
William B. Meyer, "Edward Bellamy and the Weather of Utopia," *Geographical Review* 94, no. 1 (2004): 43-54. [Available on Sakai]  
Edward Berwick, "Farming in the Year 2000, A.D." *Overland Monthly*, June 1890, pp. 569-573. [Available on Sakai]

Thurs 20 Oct **MIDTERM EXAM DUE**  
Film: *Future by Design* (2006)

#### Week 8: Engineering the Future (2)

Tues 25 Oct Visions of Other Worlds  
Washington Irving, "The Men of the Moon" [*Future Perfect*, pp. 251-254]  
Edward Bellamy, "The Blindman's World" (1886) [*Future Perfect*, pp. 261-276]  
Nancy Knight, "'The New Light': X Rays and Medical Futurism" [*Imagining Tomorrow*, pp. 10-34]  
Carolyn Marvin, "Dazzling the Multitude: Imagining the Electric Light as a Communications Medium" [*Imagining Tomorrow*, pp. 202-217]

Thurs 27 Oct Gender in Utopia  
Frederick Jesup Stimson, "Dr. Materialismus" [*Future Perfect*, pp. 156-172]  
Annie Denton Cridge, "From *Man's Rights; Or, How Would You Like It?*" [*Future Perfect*, pp. 317-336]  
Mary E. Bradley Lane, "From *Mizora: A Prophecy*" [*Future Perfect*, pp. 337-359]

Week 9: Evolutionary and Imperial Futures

Tues 1 Nov Evolutionary Science and Evolutionary Science Fiction

**THESIS PARAGRAPH DUE**

Ronald L. Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 58-75 (Chapter 3: "Darwinism in the American South: From the Early 1860s to the Late 1920s"). [Available on Sakai]

Stanley Waterloo, "Christmas 200,000 B.C." [*Future Perfect*, pp. 365-369]

William Harben, "In the Year Ten Thousand" [*Future Perfect*, pp. 389-395]

Thurs 3 Nov Representing American Empire

**NO CLASS** (I will be presenting a paper at the History of Science Society meeting in Cleveland.)

Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 184-207 (Chapter 7: "The Expositions in Portland and Seattle: 'To Celebrate the Past and to Exploit the Future'"). [Available on Sakai]

Mark Twain, "From the 'London Times' of 1904" (1898) [*Future Perfect*, pp. 376-385]

**Part III: Ideal Futures in Modern America**

Week 10: Race, Ethnicity, and the Eugenicist Future

Tues 8 Nov

Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), pp. 139-172 (Chapter 4: "Theories of Development: Scholarly Disciplines and the Hierarchy of Peoples"). [Available on Sakai]

Robert Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century of Progress Expositions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 38-58 (Chapter 2: "'Fitter Families for Future Firesides': Eugenics Exhibitions Between the Wars"). [Available on Sakai]

Thurs 10 Nov **Writing Workshop: How to Construct and Support an Argument**

**REVISED THESIS/OUTLINE OF TOPIC SENTENCES DUE**



### Week 11: Selling the Future in the New Era

Tues 15 Nov Fortune-tellers, Business Forecasters, and Promises of Love and Money  
Walter A. Friedman, "The Harvard Economic Service and the Problems of Forecasting,"  
*History of Political Economy* 41, no. 1 (2009): 57-88. [Available on Sakai]  
Excerpts from *Fortune-telling Hearings on H.R. 8989 before the Subcommittee on Judiciary*,  
69th Cong. (1926). [Available on Sakai]

Thurs 17 Nov Advertising Tomorrows

Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*  
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. xv-24 (introduction and Chapter  
1: "Apostles of Modernity"). [Available on Sakai]

Carol Willis, "Skyscraper Utopias: Visionary Urbanism in the 1920s" [*Imagining Tomorrow*,  
pp. 164-187]

**\*Find an ad from the 1920s that is somehow future-oriented. Email me the ad before  
10 AM on Thursday 17 Nov so that I can include it in a collection of the class's ads. Be  
prepared to informally present your own analysis of your ad to the class. The Duke  
University AdAccess collection is terrific:**

<http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess/>

### Week 12: Designing and Displaying the Future in the 1930s

Tues 22 Nov

Jeffrey L. Meikle, "Plastic: Material of a Thousand Uses" [*Imagining Tomorrow*, pp. 77-96]

Folke T. Kihlstedt, "Utopia Realized: The World's Fairs of the 1930s" [*Imagining Tomorrow*,  
pp. 97-118]

Brian Horrigan, "The Home of Tomorrow, 1927-1945" [*Imagining Tomorrow*, pp. 137-163]

Robert Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century of Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of  
Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 157-192 (Chapter 6, "African Americans in the World of  
Tomorrow")

## **THANKSGIVING RECESS**

### **Part IV: Forecasting in the American Century**

#### Week 13: Predictability during the Cold War

Tues 29 Nov Imagining and Controlling Future Scenarios

Olaf Helmer, "Analysis of the Future: The Delphi Method," RAND Paper (RAND Corporation:  
March 1967), pp. 1-11. [Available on Sakai]

Philip K. Dick, "The Minority Report," in *The Minority Report and Other Classic Stories*  
(Citadel, 2002), pp. 71-102. [Available on Sakai]

- Thurs 1 Dec Futurism and Population Control in the 1970s  
"The Futurists: Looking Toward A.D. 2000," *Time Magazine*, February 26, 1966. [Available on Sakai]  
Matthew Connelly, "Future Shock: The End of the World as They Knew It," in *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, eds. Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel Sargent (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp.337-350. [Available on Sakai]  
Matthew Connelly, "Controlling Passions," *The Wilson Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 60-66. [Available on Sakai]  
L. Mazur, et al., "Population Control's Missteps," Discussion of "Controlling Passions," *The Wilson Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 6-7, 9. [Available on Sakai]

Week 14: Saving and Destroying the Planet

- Tues 6 Dec Geoeengineering and Gambling in an Age of Global Warming  
James Rodger Fleming, *Fixing the Sky: The Checkered History of Weather and Climate Control* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 225-268 (Chapter 8: "The Climate Engineers"). [Available on Sakai]  
OPTIONAL: Samuel Randalls, "Weather Profits: Weather Derivatives and the Commercialization of Meteorology," *Social Studies of Science* 40, no. 5 (2010): 705-730. [Available on Sakai]

- Thurs 8 Dec Dystopia and Disaster  
**FINAL PAPERS DUE**  
Film: *Bladerunner* (1982), director Ridley Scott

Week 15: Dystopia and Disaster/Conclusions

- Tues 13 Dec Film: *Bladerunner* (1982), director Ridley Scott  
Lee Clarke, *Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 161-186 (Chapter 6: "Living and Dying in Worst Case Worlds"). [Available on Sakai]  
Conclusions and review for final exam

**FINAL EXAM: Take-home essay exam (5 pages) due to your Sakai dropbox no later than 3 PM on Monday 19 December, which is the end of our official scheduled final exam period. The essay question will be distributed no later than Thurs 8 December.**