

**History 126 -- African Civilizations**  
Fall, 2008 Moravian College

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**Topics**

This course will investigate sub-Saharan African civilizations through the study of African history, geography, and culture. Students will investigate African geography, human evolution in Africa; precolonial African lifestyles; ancient African kingdoms and empires; and early European and Islamic ties to Africa. It will also include discussions of the colonial period and independent Africa.

**Goals**

- \*Students who successfully complete the course will be able to join civic and academic conversations about African history and society by discussing the main features of the topics listed above.
- \*Students will be able to discuss the ways that Americans have traditionally viewed Africa and ways to improve the interactions between Americans and Africans.
- \*Students will learn to apply cultural relativist perspectives to Africa.
- \*Students will gain experience in analyzing primary sources in African history, geography, and culture.

African history and civilization are often difficult for the westerner to understand. More significant even than the unfamiliar names is the fact that we are not used to studying societies that face the particular problems that Africa has faced and faces. The student must develop new ways of thinking by being sensitive to the possibilities of doing things another way. This is an exercise in sympathy as well as reason, and the most difficult obstacles to overcome are usually one's own parochialism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, gender bias, racism, and so forth.

The following quote by John Gardner (*No Easy Victories*, 165) illustrates the goals of this course:

You will never advance far in your understanding of another culture if you devote yourself to exclaiming that some things about it are wonderful and other things are terrible. This comes under the heading of entertainment and should not be confused with understanding. No society is all good or all bad, and the discovery that any particular society is compounded of both good and bad is not a very impressive finding. What you must try to do is to understand what problems a society faces; why it has developed the way it has; why it has certain characteristics rather than others; why it does some things so well and other things very badly.

## **Texts**

The books listed below serve as texts for the course. Additional readings will be assigned and put on reserve in the library or on Blackboard.

Gilbert, Erik and Jonathan T. Reynolds, *Africa in World History. From Prehistory to the Present* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

D. T. Niane, *Sundiata, An Epic of Old Mali*

Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*

## **Class**

Reading assigned for a class is to be completed before that class. Reading the material before the class is essential for understanding and for useful discussions. I recommend reading both before and after class for the daily assignments (i.e. not for the novels or the epic) and taking notes and outlining (rather than highlighting or underlining). I also recommend spending time at every study session quickly reviewing lecture and reading notes.

Students are encouraged to speak to me about academic or other subjects. Office hours will be announced and they are posted on my office door. You may also make an appointment. If you try to call me in my office and there is no answer during weekdays, let my phone ring for voice mail. Or, call me evenings or weekends at home. I am also on the network during most weekdays.

Participation in class is an important part of this course and of college education; attendance will be taken regularly and your speaking in class is encouraged.

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation will be based on a map quiz (10%), reading quizzes (7%, 7%, 7%), papers (10%, 10%), and two examinations (23%, 26%). The final examination is not cumulative, except as it assumes general knowledge of the first half of the course.

Makeups for quizzes or exams are given with great reluctance, and only when an arrangement has been made with me prior to the test or for verifiable emergencies. Late papers will be penalized. On paper assignments, some papers will be returned for rewriting.

Attendance does not receive a grade, but after 2 absences each absence will result in 2 points being subtracted from your final grade.

Plagiarism will be treated consistent with the Student Handbook and may result in failure in the course. As with all courses, you are expected to keep all notes and drafts until the final grade is assigned.

While I intend to follow the syllabus closely, it is sometimes helpful or necessary to change schedules, assignments, or evaluation procedures. Thus I reserve the right to do so.

## **Papers**

Note: You may turn in your work on recycled paper.

### *1. Things Fall Apart*

Topic: In our reading by Ivan Karp -- "African Systems of Thought" -- there are a number of points made about ways African cultures are similar and dissimilar to Western cultures. Your task is examine whether Karp's points can be applied to the Igbo as described in

*Things Fall Apart*. You should choose either “similar” or “dissimilar” for your comparison.

Here’s how to proceed:

- Read Karp’s chapter and make a lists of what he considers to be similarities and dissimilarities.
- Choose either similarities or dissimilarities for your analysis.
- Ask yourself what points in *Things Fall Apart* illustrate similarities or dissimilarities.
- Construct an essay that refers to specific events, people, and ideas that demonstrate your thesis.
- Note that you do not need to agree with Karp. If you disagree, however, you need to discuss why you have come to an alternate conclusion.

Format:

Your paper should be 600 - 900 words long, word processed, and double spaced. Grammar, spelling and the like are important. So too is style. I would like to see a paper that shows evidence of your pride in your work. Begin with a thesis paragraph and proceed in an orderly way to *demonstrate* that your thesis is true. If you need help after you have read your materials and reflected on them, I will be happy to talk to you about how to state a thesis or how to present your arguments.

Some matters of style:

Insert page numbers in the text when you use ideas or quotations from specific parts of the book -- like this: (53). Quotations are acceptable as long as they are short and there are *specific* words or ideas expressed that are necessary for your analysis. If the specific words or ideas are not important, paraphrase or summarize. Integrate quotations into the text. For example, you could write: Achebe’s character Okonkwo tried to excuse himself by saying “xxxxxxxxxxx.” (52) Remember to underline or italicize foreign words such as *chi*.

## 2. *Juffure and James Island in the Late 1700s* --

Topic: The readings that you are to write on are a collection of documents that pertain to the situation on the Gambia River in the late-18th century. These are among the few documents that survive concerning that time and place. When we read histories we usually do not realize that the data historians use are often as raw and limited as those in these documents. Your task is to write a paper discussing the sources.

But now you are the historian and these are your raw data for an article you have been commissioned to write for a magazine that publishes history for popular audiences. Fashion a good story, but be true to the sources. Your piece should be history not historical fiction. Include materials from as many of these sources as you can. You may also use the relevant material in our *Africa in World History* textbook.

Format: Same as *Things Fall Apart*

## Schedule of classes

August

25 Goals, Course Schedule, and Requirements

27 Myths About Africa

Blackboard\*Keim, “How We Learn”

Blackboard\*Keim, “Africa in Images”

\*Gilbert and Reynolds, “Photo Essay I: Imagining Africa,” between pages 120 and 121

September

- 3 The Evolution of Humans and Societies \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Africa and Human Origins," 4-14  
Blackboard\*Keim, "Race and Culture: The Same and the Other"
- 8 The African Environment \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Physical Context," 15-36  
\*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Settled Life: Food Production, Technology, and Migrations," 37-62
- 10 The Evolution of Humans and Societies  
**Map Quiz (10%)**
- 15 Lineage Societies  
Blackboard\*Karp, "African Systems of Thought"  
\*Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*  
\*Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*  
\*Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
- 17 Lineage Societies
- 22 Lineage Societies  
**BBPaper due (10%) on *Things Fall Apart***
- 24 Centralized Societies - West Savanna  
\*Gilbert and Reynolds, "North and West Africa and the Spread of Islam," 95-116  
\*Niane, *Sundiata*  
\*Niane, *Sundiata*
- 29 Centralized Societies - West Savanna  
**Reading Quiz (7%) on *Sundiata***

October

- 1 Centralized Societies - Central, East, and South \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "East Africa and the Advent of Islam," 117-135  
Blackboard\*Reefe, "The Luba-Lunda Empire"
- (Fall Break)
- 8 Centralized Societies - Central, East, and South \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Southern Africa: 1500-1870," 219-237
- 13 **Examination**
- 15 Europe's Arrival in Tropical Africa \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Slavery and the Creation of the Atlantic World," 141-174  
Blackboard\*Keim, ed., *Juffure and James Island in the Late 1700s*
- 20 Slave Trade
- Paper Due (10%)**
- 22 Transition to Legitimate Trade in West Africa \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "West and West-Central Africa 1500-1800," 175-200  
Blackboard\*Keim, "The Origins of 'Darkest Africa'"
- 27 Colonialism -- Conquest and Resistance \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Colonialism and African Resistance," 265-286  
Blackboard\*Keim, "'Our Living Ancestors': Twentieth-Century Evolutionism"
- 29 Colonialism -- Attitudes  
Blackboard\*Keim, "Real Africa, Wise Africa"  
Blackboard\*Keim, "Cannibalism: No Accounting for Taste"  
Blackboard\*Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders"

November

- 3 Colonialism -- Techniques \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Economic Change in Modern Africa: Forced Integration into the World System," 287-315  
Blackboard\*Frederick Lugard, "The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa: Methods of Ruling Native Races"  
Blackboard\*Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary"
- 5 Colonialism \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Political Change in the Time of Colonialism," 316-341  
Blackboard\*Keim, "Safari: Beyond Our Wildest Dreams"

- 10 Colonialism – Techniques \*Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*
- 12 Colonialism -- Changes in African Societies \*Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*
- Reading Quiz** (7%) on *No Longer at Ease*
- 17 Independence \*Gilbert and Reynolds, “African Culture in the Modern World,” 342-361  
Blackboard\*Keim, “Africans Live in Tribes, Don’t They?”
- 19 Independence \*Gilbert and Reynolds, “Politics in the Era of Decolonization and Independence,” 363-393
- 24 Independence Blackboard\*Keim, “We Should Help Them”
- December*
- 1 Independence Blackboard\* Keim, “From Imagination to Dialogue”
- Reading Quiz** (7%) on Keim readings on Blackboard
- 3 Independence \*Gilbert and Reynolds, “Contemporary Africa,” 394-420
- 8 Africa and World History \*Gilbert and Reynolds, “Photo Essay II: Crossing the Borders of African and World History,” between pages 312 and 313
- 10 Independence—Conclusions

**Final Examination**

Here is the poem by William Butler Yeats from which Achebe took his title, *Things Fall Apart*.

### **The Second Coming**

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouching toward Bethlehem to be born?