

History 126 -- African Civilizations

Spring, 2011 Moravian College

T TH 2:35-3:45 PPHAC 117

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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 environments, human evolution in Africa; pre-colonial African lifestyles; ancient African kingdoms and empires; and early European and Islamic ties to Africa. The course 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 issues 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.

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

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

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

Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*

Keim, Curtis A., *Mistaking Africa. Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*

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 also check my e-mail during most weekdays, but maybe not during weekends.

Participation in class is an important part of this course and of college education; attendance will be taken regularly and I encourage you to speak in class.

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be based on a map quiz (10%), four out of five textbook reading quizzes (5%, 5%, 5%, 5%), three novel/epic reading quizzes (5%, 5%, 5%); two papers (10%, 10%), participation (5%), and two examinations (15%, 15%).

Make-ups 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 two absences each absence will result in two 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.

Grading criteria on papers are as follows:

TREATMENT OF SUBJECT: The best papers show a full completion of the assignment, careful study and consideration of the topic, accurate information and citation, full development, originality, and ability to analyze and relate ideas. Weak papers tend to be incomplete, inaccurate, thin, and vague.

ORGANIZATION: In the best papers the logic of organization is always transparent so that the reader always knows what the task is and how the writer intends to accomplish it. A controlling thesis, stated at the outset, is systematically treated with arguments and support that always make sense. A weak paper tends to wander and get off the subject; it lacks a clear beginning, middle, and end.

PARAGRAPHS: Strong paragraphs are unified, coherent, and well developed. They have one controlling idea and give sufficient support to the idea to satisfy the reader that the subject has been adequately dealt with in an orderly fashion. Weak paragraphs lack a single controlling idea, tight structure, and full development.

SENTENCES: Strong sentences are clear in meaning, easy to read, varied in style, and linked to neighboring sentences to maintain continuity. Weak sentences tend to be uniformly flat, awkward or in primer style, unclear, and unconnected to neighboring sentences.

WORDS: The best words convey the exact meaning and unique voice of the author. Weak words are imprecise, inappropriate, and flat in style. A dictionary and thesaurus are essential tools of an author.

GRAMMAR: including spelling and punctuation: You can study or check accepted usage in grammar books and dictionaries.

PROOFREADING AND PRESENTATION: A velvet cushion or gold-embossed folder is unnecessary, and neither is a title page. But pride in your work will be evident in how you take care of the mechanics of writing.

Some matters of style:

-Insert page numbers in the text when you use ideas or quotations from specific parts of the book -- like this: (52).

-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, "xxxxxxxxx." (52)

-Remember to underline or italicize foreign words such as *chi*.

-Some words to watch out for: who/that/whom/which; effect (n.)/affect (v.); number/amount; fewer/less

Paper assignments

1. *Juffure and James Island in the Late 1700s*

Topic: The readings that you are to write on are a collection of primary and secondary sources that pertain to the situation on the Gambia River in the 18th century. Note that relatively few documents 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.

Historians have to sort through such information and make sense of it. In this paper, however, I'm not interested in the *overall* sense that can be made (i.e., the story) so much as I am in the *value* of the sources.

At the end of this syllabus I've attached a sheet that tells you a bit about the authors of the documents. As an historian, you would normally search out this information yourselves. But here I provide it because some of the authors would be impossible for you to locate in the time we have.

When you have considered the documents and their authors, be sure you go to our textbook to read what it says about the slave trade. Then write a paper that analyzes the documents in light of their authors and what you have read in our text about the slave trade. How can these sources help us better understand the slave trade in one place and more generally? In what respect are the sources strong or weak?

Format: Your paper should be 600 - 900 words long, word processed, and double-spaced. You may turn in your work on recycled paper and it may be printed front and back.

Help: 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.

3. *Primary Source Paper*

Topic: At the end of the syllabus there's a list of primary sources (speeches, letters, texts, photos, maps) from African history. All, or almost all, are available on the Internet and for some I've provided URLs. In class, we'll each pick a source to examine.

The tasks here are to i) take your source and read it carefully to discern what the person is saying; ii) find out about the origin of the source; iii) find the place in our text book where the period relevant to your source is discussed; iv) find one substantial peer-reviewed secondary source related to your source; v) write a paper according to the outline in the next paragraph.

Here's the outline: 1) A good paper needs an argument, what we also call a thesis. In your first paragraph state your argument ("I argue that...") and at least three points that you are going to discuss in support of your argument. 2) Then give your reader some background about primary source (Who is speaking? When? Where? Who made the map? When was the photo taken? And so forth....) and about the historical context in which it appeared. 3) Next take at least a paragraph each for the points that you used to support your thesis. 4) Finally, conclude by summarizing your thesis and points of support. You can also mention the limits of your findings and what else could be done to further the research. 5) You'll need a Works Cited section that lists your primary source, our textbook, and your secondary source. Cite these using Chicago Style. You can find a guide to the Chicago Style in the Bedford Handbook (used for basic writing courses at Moravian) or online (try: <http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/>). 6) Please include a URL for your primary source or a copy of the document.

One little point to remember: There are often discrepancies between words and deeds. Your documents are words (except for the maps and photo). One of the issues you must confront is whether the words match the deeds of the author.

Format: Your paper should be 1200-1500 words long, word processed, and double-spaced. You may turn in your work on recycled paper and it may be printed front and back.

Help: 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.

Schedule of classes

January

18 Introduction

20 Myths About Africa

*Keim, "The Origins of 'Darkest Africa'"

*Keim, "'Our Living Ancestors': Twentieth-Century Evolutionism"

*Keim, "Real Africa, Wise Africa"

*Keim, "Africa in Images"

25 Myths About Africa

*Keim, "Cannibalism: No Accounting for Taste"

Reading Quiz

*Keim, "Africans Live in Tribes, Don't They?"

*Keim, "Safari: Beyond Our Wildest Dreams"

27 The Evolution of Humans and Societies

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Africa and Human Origins," 4-14

February

- 1 The African Environment *Gilbert and Reynolds, "Physical Context," 15-36
- Reading Quiz** *Gilbert and Reynolds, "Settled Life: Food Production, Technology, and Migrations," 37-62
- 3 The Evolution of Humans and Societies
Map Quiz *Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
- 8 Lineage Societies
Bibliographic search *Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
- 10 Lineage Societies
Novel Quiz on *Things Fall Apart* *Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
- 15 Centralized Societies - West Savanna *Gilbert and Reynolds, "North and West Africa and the Spread of Islam," 95-96, 103-116
- Choose project topics *Niane, *Sundiata*
- 17 Centralized Societies - West Savanna
Epic Quiz on *Sundiata* *Niane, *Sundiata*
- 22 Centralized Societies - Central, East, and South *Gilbert and Reynolds, "East Africa and the Advent of Islam," 117-134
*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Southern Africa, 1500-1870," 244-257 (note: only a portion of this chapter)
- 24 Slave Trade Blackboard *Keim, ed., *Juffure and James Island in the Late 1700s*
- Paper due** on *Juffure and James Island*

March

- 1 Europe's Arrival in Tropical Africa *Gilbert and Reynolds, "Slavery and the Creation of the Atlantic World," 141-174
- 3 **Midterm exam**
- Spring break* (March 7, 10)
- 15 Transition to Legitimate Trade in West Africa *Gilbert and Reynolds, "West and West-Central Africa 1500-1800," 175-200
- 17 Colonialism – Conquest and Resistance *Gilbert and Reynolds, "Southern Africa, 1500-1870," 257-264
- Submit secondary source for project
- 22 Colonialism – Conquest and Resistance *Gilbert and Reynolds, "Colonialism and African Resistance," 265-286
- Reading Quiz**
- 24 Colonialism -- Attitudes Watch video: "White Man's Country"
*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Economic Change in Modern Africa: Forced Integration into the World System," 287-315
- 29 Colonialism -- Techniques *Gilbert and Reynolds, "Political Change in the Time of Colonialism," 316-341

Reading Quiz

31 Colonialism– Techniques

*Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*

April

5 Colonialism -- Changes in Societies

*Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*

Novel Quiz on *No Longer at Ease*

7 Independence

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Politics in the Era of Decolonization and Independence," 363-393

*Keim, "We Should Help Them"

12 Independence - Mazrui

14 Independence

Project due

19 Independence

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Contemporary Africa," 394-420

Reading Quiz

Easter break (April 21, 22)

26 Independence

*Keim, "From Imagination to Dialogue"

28 Conclusions

May

6 Final examination

The final examination will cover the material since the midterm.

Elective retake of map quiz

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?

Juffure and James Island authors:

Map 1: Philip Curtin – see below

Map 2: J. M. Gray – see below

Map 3: Francis Moore – see below

Glossary: I prepared this to orient you to a few words and places. Note that some words have different spellings in different documents.

Mungo Park: We'll see Mungo Park in another document later in the term. He's best known as the first modern European explorer of Africa. In the late 18th century a small group of middle class professionals in England decided that they wanted to discover the source of the Nile River. Reports had filtered into Europe that there was a large river in the interior of West Africa. That river, now known as the Niger, had no known outlet from the continent (because it filters out through a delta in today's Nigeria) and these Englishmen, who called themselves the Africa Association, thought that this river might actually be the Nile. They were wrong, of course, but they were also the first of many Europeans to foster exploration of the interior of Africa. They advertised for someone to take a trip into the interior and Mungo Park, a young Scottish doctor, responded. He entered the continent by way of the Gambia River.

Francis Moore: Moore went to Africa when he was quite young and kept a journal that he said he did not intend to publish. In the preface he said that he only wrote what was true and that when he quoted other sources he left the text as it was even if his sources were contradictory. He also noted that the French on the Gambia River "harassed" Africans so they could gain more of the trade. He dedicated his work to the Duke of Montagu.

Donald Wright: This author was one of my graduate school classmates. His dissertation topic was the kingdom of Niumi. He spent a year in Gambia working in the national archives in Banjul and living in Niumi so he could interview local griots and others about Niumi history. Some of his account discusses the period we are interested in. Note the kinds of sources he used for this passage.

Philip Curtin: This person is the best known of our modern authors. He is most famous because he was the first to provide an accurate estimate of the number of Africans who were taken from Africa to the Americas as slaves. He went to the archives of all of the slaving ports in the New World and found the records of the ships that had landed with slaves. Others have modified his estimate of about 9 million slaves over three centuries to about 11 million, but Curtin showed that many guesses were much too large. (See page 164 of our text.) In the book that is quoted here, Curtin undertakes an economic history of the entire Senegambian region before colonialism. That is, he focusses on the Senegal and Gambia River regions and

the lands in the interior and not just on the mouth of the Gambia River, as we do in our documents. For many years Curtin taught at Johns-Hopkins University and once I invited him here to give a lecture. He spoke of human migrations before Columbus, including possible early migrations of Africans to the New World. Again, note where Curtin got his information for the first chart, and imagine how he calculated the data in the second chart.

J. M. Gray: Unlike Wright, Curtin, and Galloway, J. M. Gray does not have a doctorate even though he writes as an historian. Justice Gray is a Briton who worked in British archives and libraries in the late 1930s to produce his account. His aim seems to have been mostly to tell the story of what Europeans did in the Gambia since its discovery by the Portuguese in the 1400s. The book first came out in 1940. (Note that there is a transcription error in the text and that it should be 1766 instead of 1866.)

Anonymous: This is a source that Donald Wright sent to me. He found it in the French National Archives while looking for sources for his dissertation.

William Littleton: We don't know any more about Littleton than is revealed here. He had been a slave trader in the Gambia River region and he was called by the House of Commons (London) to testify. Why do you suppose Parliament was interested in the slave trade in 1789?

Winifred Galloway: One of my graduate student friends, Winifred Galloway lived in Banjul for several years and worked in the Gambian national archives. My wife and I visited her there and later I took Moravian students to visit her as well as Juffure and James Island. Galloway was not focussed on Niimi, but she did create this chronology of Gambian history and she studied the history and culture of the Wolof.