

History 126 A and B -- African Civilizations
Fall, 2011 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 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* (3rd 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. I check my e-mail during most weekdays, but maybe not during weekends. 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.

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 (8%), four out of five textbook reading quizzes (5%, 5%, 5%, 5%), two novel reading quizzes (5%, 5%); convocation quiz (2%), two papers (10%, 10%), participation (5%), and two examinations (17%, 18%).

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. A pattern of unexcused tardiness will negatively affect a student's grade, with one tardy equal to one third of a whole class absence.

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:

-Citations: Insert page numbers in the text when you use ideas or quotations from specific parts of a 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, "xxxxxxxxxx." (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 (look up "count nouns" in a grammar book).

Paper assignments

1. *Sundiata. An Epic of Old Mali* (September 29)

Topic: *Sundiata* is an epic of a warrior king that has been memorized and told by griots (professional historians) for almost 800 years. Our version tells the story in prose form, but the griots tell the story using songs (verse) accompanied by a lute-like instrument called a kora, sometimes thought to be the ancestor of the banjo. Our version is relatively short, but when told by a griot the story takes many hours, usually spread over several days of performance.

Over time, different versions have arisen in different parts of what used to be Sundiata's empire of Mali. While the outline of the story is the same everywhere, individual incidents may vary considerably. For example, in our version Sundiata is born eight years after his brother, who loses his claim to the throne. In another version Sundiata is born first but temporarily loses his right to the throne because his brother's birth is wrongly announced first.

So, here's the topic I'd like you to write about. What can historians use this epic for? We know it's not a completely accurate description of the past, but it's not fiction either. How would *you* go about using the epic to help us understand the history of this region of Africa?

Pay attention to the criteria for grading above and especially to "organization." Strong essays have a clear thesis ("I argue that..."), clear support for the thesis, and a clear end. Also be sure to make specific references to the epic.

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.

2. *Juffure and James Island in the Late 1700s* (October 18)

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 often the data historians use are as raw and limited as those in these documents. We also don't consider that there are many interesting questions that we simply can't answer because there are no relevant documents for these topics.

Historians have to sort through the existing information and make sense of it. Thus writing history is generally not so much about recounting facts about the past as it is about making arguments about what the facts mean. This implies that different historians see the facts differently and that there are often competing historical interpretations.

In this paper, I'd like you to begin where any historian would. Read the documents carefully and then write an essay that discusses what questions the documents can reasonably answer. I'd like you to discuss all of the documents, including the maps and charts. Then I'd like you to consider whether the documents as a group can answer questions that can't be answered by using individual documents. Remember that you'll need a thesis.

You might construct your essay document by document. This is straightforward, but it would probably be a bit dull, like a catalog. A more elegant construction might be to group documents (you'll need to decide on the categories) so that groups include types of documents or types of questions that can be answered.

Format: Your paper should be 900 - 1100 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

August

30 Introduction

September

1 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"

6 Myths About Africa

*Keim, "Cannibalism: No Accounting for Taste"

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

*Keim, "Safari: Beyond Our Wildest Dreams"

Reading Quiz

8 The African Environment

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Physical Context of African History," 4-13

The Evolution of Humans and Societies

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Africa and Human Origins," 14-24

13 Environment, Technology, Food, and Culture

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Finding Food and Talking about It: The First 100,000 Years," 25-

(Foraging and Farming)

39

- Reading Quiz**
- 15 Convocation
- 20 The Evolution of Societies
(emphasis here on lineage societies)
- Map Quiz and Convocation Quiz**
- 22 Small-Scale Lineage-Based Societies
Novel Quiz: *Things Fall Apart*
- 27 The Evolution of Societies
(emphasis here on centralized societies of the Western Savanna)
- 29 Centralized Societies - West Savanna
Paper on *Sundiata*

October

- 4 Centralized Societies - East and South
- 6 **Midterm exam**
- 11 *Fall break*
- 13 Europe's Arrival in Tropical Africa
- 18 Slave Trade
Paper on *Juffure and James Island*
- 20 Transition to Legitimate Trade in West Africa
- 25 Colonialism – Conquest and Resistance

Reading Quiz

- 27 Colonialism -- Attitudes

November

- 1 Colonialism -- Techniques
Reading Quiz
- 3 Colonialism-- Techniques
- 8 Colonialism -- Changes in Societies
Novel Quiz: *No Longer at Ease*
- 10 Independence
- 15 Independence

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Settled Life: Food Production, Technology, and Migrations," 40-66

*Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

*Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

*Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "North and West Africa and the Spread of Islam," 98-99, 105-119

*Niane, *Sundiata*

*Niane, *Sundiata*

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "East Africa and the Advent of Islam," 120-138

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Southern Africa, 1500-1870," 241-255 (note: only a portion of this chapter)

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Slavery and the Creation of the Atlantic World," 143-174

Blackboard*Keim, ed., *Juffure and James Island in the Late 1700s*

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "West and West-Central Africa 1500-1800," 175-198

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Southern Africa, 1500-1870," 255-261

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Colonialism and African Resistance," 262-285

Watch video: "White Man's Country"

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Economic Change in Modern Africa: Forced Integration into the World System," 286-313 (but not the cartographic essay)

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Political Change in the Time of Colonialism," 314-338

*Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*

*Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*

*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Politics in the Era of Decolonization and Independence," 360-387

*Keim, "We Should Help Them"

17 Independence	Take a break from reading. Video by Ali Mazrui Blackboard*Ferdinand Okwaro, "Ritual Healing and Modernity in Western Kenya," <i>VEN (Viennese Ethnomedicine Newsletter)</i> , 8, 2-3 (Spring/Summer 2011), 5-13.
22 Independence	
24 <i>Thanksgiving</i>	*Gilbert and Reynolds, "African Culture in the Modern World," 339-359
29 Independence Reading Quiz	
December	
1 Independence	*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Contemporary Africa," 388-415
6 Conclusions	The final examination will cover the material since the midterm. Only the highest grade counts.
13 Final examination	
Elective retake of map quiz	

Here is the poem by William Butler Yeats from which Achebe took a title:

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?