

**History 126 A and B -- African Civilizations**  
Fall, 2012 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* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

## **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 and usually, but not always, during evenings and 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 Elaine Mara, assistant director of learning services for academic and disability support at 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation will be based on a map quiz (10%), four out of five textbook reading quizzes (5%, 5%, 5%, 5%), one novel reading quiz (5%) one epic reading quiz (5%), 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.

Academic dishonesty 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.

## **Paper assignments**

### 1. *Things Fall Apart* (September 24)

**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 to 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 list 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 your choice.
- Construct an essay that refers to specific events, people, and ideas in *Things Fall Apart* that demonstrate your thesis. (Remember that the point of this essay is to practice writing and thinking but also to demonstrate that you have read the book. So pick examples from here and there in the book.)
- 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.
- Your task is not to pick the culture that is best. All cultures have good and bad features. Rather, look for cultural characteristics that have relevance for Karp’s points.

**Format:**

Your paper should be about 900 words long (3 pages), word processed, and double spaced. You may turn in your work on recycled paper and it may be printed front and back. 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.

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:**

- Begin with a thesis paragraph (“I argue that...”) and proceed in an orderly way to *demonstrate* that your thesis is true.
- Insert page numbers in the text when you use ideas or quotations from specific parts of the book -- like this: (53).
- Quotations are acceptable and encouraged as long as they are short and express *specific* words or ideas 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 “xxxxxxx.” (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); it’s (a contraction, not a possessive form).

2. *Juffure and James Island in the Late 1700s* (October 17) (These documents are on Blackboard.)

Topic: The readings that you are to discuss 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.

For this paper:

-Read pages 157 and 158 on "The Nature of the Slave Trade" in the Gilbert and Reynolds textbook and pick out the major points that those authors make.

-Read the *Juffure and James Island* documents and use them to illustrate the major points in Gilbert and Reynolds.

-Be sure to demonstrate that you have read all of the *Juffure and James Island* documents.

-You do not have to agree with all of the documents and, in fact, there are some inconsistencies between documents that you could point out.

-Remember that your essay needs a thesis. A thesis generally argues a point. For example, you could argue that the documents "do" or "do not" illustrate the Gilbert and Reynolds reading. "Do not" would be more of a real argument than "do," of course, and it might make for a more interesting paper, if you could pull it off. Another argument you might make is that in addition to what Gilbert and Reynolds say there are other important points illustrated by the documents. Or, you could show how the documents contradict our textbook.

Overall, I am interested in you having practice with close analysis of the documents. The Gilbert and Reynolds text just gives you a framework for organization. Analysis of documents is what historians do. But it's also what those in many professions do so you are building skills that will help you in many careers.

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*

27 Introduction

29 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"

### *September*

3 *Labor Day* – no class

5 Myths About Africa-

#### **Reading Quiz**

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

\*Keim, "Safari: Beyond Our Wildest Dreams"

10 The African Environment

\*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Physical Context of

The Evolution of Humans and Societies

African History," 4-13

- 12 Environment, Technology, Food, and Culture (Foraging and Farming)

**Reading Quiz**

- 17 The Evolution of Societies- (emphasis on lineage societies)

**Map Quiz**

- 19 Small-Scale Lineage-Based Societies

- 24 Small-Scale Lineage-Based Societies  
**Paper** on *Things Fall Apart*

- 26 The Evolution of Societies (emphasis on centralized societies of the Western Savanna)

**October**

- 1 Centralized Societies - West Savanna  
**Quiz** on *Sundiata*  
3 **Midterm exam**  
8 *Fall Break* – no class  
10 Centralized Societies - East and South

- 15 Europe's Arrival in Tropical Africa

- 17 Slave Trade  
**Paper** on *Juffure and James Island*

- 22 Transition to Legitimate Trade in West Africa  
24 Colonialism – Conquest and Resistance

**Reading Quiz**

- 29 Colonialism – Attitudes

- 31 Colonialism – Techniques

**November**

- 5 Colonialism – Techniques  
**Reading Quiz**  
7 Colonialism – Changes in Societies  
**Quiz** on *No Longer at Ease*

\*Gilbert and Reynolds, “Africa and Human Origins,” 14-24

\*Gilbert and Reynolds, “Finding Food and Talking about It: The First 100,000 Years,” 25-39

\*Gilbert and Reynolds, “Settled Life: Food Production, Technology, and Migrations,” 40-66

Blackboard\* Karp, “African Systems of Thought”

\*Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

\*Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

\*Gilbert and Reynolds, “North and West Africa and the Spread of Islam,” 98-99, 105-119 (note: only a portion of this chapter)

\*Niane, *Sundiata* (provide introduction)

\*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*

- 12 Independence \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Politics in the Era of Decolonization and Independence," 360-387
- 14 Independence \*Keim, "We Should Help Them"
- 19 Independence Blackboard \*Ferdinand Okwaro, "Ritual Healing and Modernity in Western Kenya," *VEN (Viennese Ethnomedicine Newsletter)*, 8, 2-3 (Spring/Summer 2011), 5-13
- 21 *Thanksgiving* – no class
- 26 Independence \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "African Culture in the Modern World," 339-359
- Reading Quiz**
- 28 Independence \*Gilbert and Reynolds, "Contemporary Africa," 388-415
- 3 Independence Visit from Dr. Kwame Essien (He may have a short reading for us.)
- 5 Conclusions

### ***December***

12 Section A **Final examination** at 1:30

Section B **Final examination** at 8:30

The final examination will cover the material since the midterm and will include an elective retake of map quiz. Only the highest map quiz grade counts.

Here is the poem by William Butler Yeats from which Achebe took the title of one of our novels:

#### **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?