

Spring 2009
HIST 3318:
An Introduction To African History: The Pre-colonial Era

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Office hours: W 9:00-1200, 1-3:30, or by appointment.

Lectures: W 3:30-6:00, Pafford 208

Office hours: W 9:00-1200, 1-3:30, or by appointment

Class: Wed. 3:30-6:00, Pafford 208

Course Description and Learning outcomes.: This is an introductory course on selected themes in African history from the emergence of modern humans through the foundations of African societies until contact with European cultures to the eve of European conquest and white settlement in Africa. While the course follows the developments and processes that shaped African society before the 1880s in a loose chronological framework, it is primarily concerned with important themes related to economic, environmental, social, cultural and political developments. Students who successfully complete this course will be able to identify and analyze in writing the nature of the African continent, to explain the importance of the environment to African societies, to describe selected examples of African societies and civilizations, and to explain major themes in the emergence and development of African states.

This is a lecture and seminar discussion-based course. Students are reminded, however, that reading and writing are essential parts of the course. All students are expected to fulfill the reading assignments in order to follow the course, participate in discussions and complete written assignments. The recommended books and reading assignments are designed to provide students with a basic understanding of the course material. They are by no means an exhaustive list of what you should be reading. I will direct students to supplementary readings from time to time. The more you read, the more you learn. Students are expected to attend all the lectures and attendance will be taken. If you miss more than two or three lectures, please ensure that you see me and get class notes from a fellow student.

Required Texts:

J. Reynolds and E. Gilbert, *Africa in World History, 2nd Edition*

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

S. Hamdun and N. King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*

D. Northrup, *The Atlantic Slave Trade, 2nd Edition*

Other readings will be assigned and will be made available to students through the The UWG Department of History Web page link to Prof. MacKinnon's web page. Be sure to check the reading assignments for each class and do the reading in advance.

Course Requirements:

Essay: 25%

Mid-term exam: 25%

Class Reports: 20% (10% for each of two)

Final exam: 30%

Requirements

1. All students are expected to **attend all the classes**, to hand in assignments on-time and to sit the exams in the times and dates noted below. Failure to do so for any reason other than documented and verifiable medical issues will adversely affect your grade and the instructor reserves the right to fail or reduce a student's grade for missing more than 4 classes and/or assignments.
2. Each student will be responsible for preparing and presenting a **written report** based on all the readings **for two assigned class topics**. These reports will be presented to the class on the days assigned.
3. Essay topics and further guidelines will be handed out well in advance of the **due date of 15 April. Essays are to be 6-8 pages in length (1500-2000 words)**, not including bibliography. NB: Essays are to be type-written and in conformity with accepted University standards. Your essay must have a thesis or argument and clear evidence to support it. You must use at least four print sources (library books or journal articles) in addition to any course readings or Internet-based sources. If you are in doubt about the appropriateness of the sources, please consult the instructor. If you have any queries or require any help writing your essay, please see the instructor or go to the University Writing Center. Prior to final submission, you must hand in a **draft of your paper** with the statement of your argument clearly underlined and with a preliminary bibliography on **25 March**. Further details of suggested bibliographies and expectations for the work will be made available before the assignments are given out.
4. **Exams**: The mid-term and final exam will be **essay format exams** based on course topics and discussions. They may be given as in-class exams or as take-home exams and will be written or due in the times noted below.

A NOTE ON ACADEMIC HONESTY and other class policies

- All students are expected to conduct themselves with honesty and to **DO THEIR OWN WORK**. Cheating, in whatever form not only does a disservice to you, fellow students and the University community, it is fraud and brings severe disciplinary action. I refer all students to the section on Academic Honesty in the University Catalogue. I reserve the right to fail any student for academic dishonesty, and further disciplinary action may be taken.
- No electronic devices of any kind may be used during exams, tests or quizzes.**
- Students who are late to class, or who leave early (based on the instructor's determination of time) will not be permitted to write any tests, quizzes or exams in that class period.
- NO CELL PHONES IN CLASS. NO COMPUTERS MAY BE USED IN CLASS (Unless by prior arrangement based on verifiable need)**. Students who use their cell phones in class will be asked to leave the class.
- There is no extra credit provided for this course.
- The instructor will not accept work that has been submitted for another course in this course.
- Students causing a disturbance or engaging in disruptive behavior (as deemed so by the instructor and as defined by UWG policy) will be asked to leave the class. Persistent disruptions will result in the student being dropped from the class with a failing grade.
- Students who seek to be successful in this class should expect to prepare and study **at least two to three hours outside of class for each hour spent in class. Additional study time may be required for some students.**

Weekly Assignments and lectures:

7 Jan. Introduction and Course Handouts

14 Jan. Africa and Human Origins

Readings: Gilbert and Reynolds (G&R), chp. 1

21 Jan. African Societies, Economies and African Environments

Readings: Gilbert and Reynolds (G&R), chp. 2 and D. Schoenbrun, >We Are What We Eat: Ancient Agriculture Between The Great Lakes= Online JSTOR journal: Journal of African History, Vol. 34, No 1,1993, pp 1-31. and

28 Jan. African Societies, Economies and African Environments, G&R, chp 3 and PDF on Prof. MacKinnon's web page, C. Kriger, >Iron Production in Central Africa=

4 Feb. African, Christianity and the Mediterranean World: Contributions and Controversies

G&R, Chps. 4, 5 and C. Williams, >Egypt: The Rise and Fall of Black Civilization= PDF on Prof. MacKinnon's web page

11 Feb. Islam, Trade and State foundations: North and West

G&R, Chp. 6 and on the Prof MacKinnon's web page, D. Wright, >Niumi in a restructuring world system before A.D. 1446'

18 Feb. Sundiata and State Building

Discussion of Sundiata. Read D. T. Niane, *Sundiata An Epic of Old Mali* and on reserve PDF reserve on Prof. MacKinnon's web page: R. Hull, Origins of Cities and Towns=

25 Feb. ****Mid-Term Exam****

4 March. Islam and Trade: East Africa

G&S, chp. 7 and PDF on Prof. MacKinnon's web page: J Fleisher behind the Sultan of Kilwa=s ARebellious Conduct@= from Reid and Lane, African Historical Archaeology

11 March Africa and the World: Islam, Travel and Intellectual Africa

Read S. Hamdun and N. King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*

18 March: NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

25 March Africa, Slavery and the Global Economy*** **DRAFT ESSAYS DUE*****

G&S chp 8 and PDFs of selection from J Thornton, Africa and Africans in the making of the Atlantic World, chp.3 and C. Hilliard, excerpt from >Intellectual Traditions of Pre-Colonial Africa: Affonso of the Kongo==

1 April. Slavery and Transformations in West/Central Africa

G&S chp 8 and Northrup, chps I and II.

8 April. Southern Africa

G&S, chp 12, On Prof. MacKinnon's web page, >The Making of New States= from A. MacKinnon, Then Making of South Africa.

15 April. =****Essays Due**** **Presentation of Essay topics and arguments by each student.**

22 April. Conclusion and Review

*****FINAL EXAM***:** The Final Exam is **Friday 1 May from 2-4 pm.** All students must sit the exam in this scheduled slot. **Alternatively, the instructor may provide a take-home exam which will be due by, or before the exam time slot.**

THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE. IT IS THE STUDENT'S TO COME TO ALL CLASSES AND TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR NOTING ANY CHANGES. PLEASE CHECK WITH THE INSTRUCTOR DIRECTLY ABOUT ANY POSSIBLE CHANGES.

An Introduction To African History: The Pre-colonial era

TERMS , CONCEPTS AND WORKING DEFINITIONS:

African History: The study of the processes and events which shaped the peoples and environment in the continent of Africa. We will be considering the underlying social, economic and political forces which changed Africa over time.

Africanist Historiography: The transforming paradigms and theories that shape our understanding of African history and which place an emphasis on the indigenous peoples of Africa. The term historiography also pertains to the body of historical literature on a given theme or region. Historiography reflects the debates among historians concerning the interpretation of historical facts and ideas.

Class: A complex theoretical system that defines social stratification on the basis of economic, social and productive attributes. Loosely speaking, the term class suggests that people operate in their own economic self interest according to their position in society. Although historians often see people operating according to their '>class interest,' class is not static and it is not the only defining feature of a person=s economic or social position. (See also Race, Ethnicity and Gender.) Some historians often see class conflict where producers oppose non-producers (those who own or control capital resources) who >exploit= them as an inherent feature of class relations.

Ethnicity: Within African history the concept of ethnicity relates to groupings of people who share a common language, ideas, beliefs, social system and values. Although ethnicity is related to race (see below) the two terms are not necessarily defined by each other. While people cannot change their race, they can mold their ethnicity. Ethnicity should be distinguished from the largely defunct historical term >tribal= since this latter term relies too heavily on stereotypes imposed from outside observers. As we will see, ethnicity, and particularly ethnic nationalism can be reconstructed and changed.

Gender: The term gender relates to a recognized set of characteristics, and social and economic activities normally associated with either men or women. It should be distinguished from the physical classification of men and women by their sex since men and women can assume different gender roles or activities depending on their circumstances.

Mode(s) of Production: A theoretical term, now seldom used which was coined to express the concept of a system of production and its associated forms of social organization. A mode helps identify how a given society or part of a society organizes itself to procure the material goods needed for survival. The modes of production with which we will be concerning ourselves are, for example: Hunter-gatherer- where people organize their labor to procure their material needs from what is available to them in the natural world (the Khoi (Khoe) and San of southern Africa are one example); communalism - where society organizes shared labor tasks such as agriculture and herding with land and resources which are not privately owned, but rather held in trust for all the people; Capitalism where the >means of production= (the tools and resources necessary to produce material needs are >owned= by a particular group or class of people) operate according to market exchanges where people buy and sell goods and labor. According to the classical definition of capitalism, the market, including the sale of labor, is meant to be free from major political control or coercion. A mode of production is therefore partly determined by who owns the tools of production. The identification of any given economic system provides historians with an understanding of how other related social and political activities are organized. Within this overall theoretical construct there lies a notion of >progress= and development from one stage or mode to another. Thus, capitalism is seen to be a more efficient and refined set of economic relations used to secure material needs than hunting and gathering. Without attaching a value judgment to the different ways in which people procure their needs, try to consider capitalism as a system which may develop out of pre-capitalist (communalism and feudalism for example) modes of production. An important thing to note regarding the development of capitalism in Africa -or in any in any area=s historical development- is that different people and societies often employ multiple strategies to satisfy their basic material needs

(subsistence) and to accumulate a surplus for times of want, to expand and develop their mode of production, or to invest in improved or expanded production.

Peasant: Briefly stated, a peasant is a person who has one foot in the capitalist economy of market exchange and one foot in the pre-capitalist economy of >primitive= cultivation. Peasants generally produce enough food for their family to live on (subsistence) with varying amounts of surplus that can be sold or exchanged for other needs. A peasant's ultimate security and satisfaction of material needs come from having rights to land and access to family labor. The term suggests that peasants are agricultural producers who are moving toward full integration with the market economy, but that they are sometimes constrained in this effort by dominant groups in society.

Race: The classification of people according to their physical characteristics (for example shape of eyes, color of skin, type of hair). In historical perspective, the term race has been used to explain why some groups of people have interests that differ or are, at times, in opposition to other groups. For our purposes, the term also implies a power dominance relationship between Africans and whites. As we will see, however, other social dynamics can come into play. For example, class, ethnicity and gender can also shape social, political and economic relations between races.

Tradition and Custom: African societies are sometimes referred to as >traditional= and are seen as wedded to ancient >tribal custom'. These terms suggest that African society was static, backward and inherently conservative. They are often used to refer to activities or stages of development that are considered pre-capitalist or >primitive.' Just because some features of African society may appear to be traditional and primitive does not mean they have lesser value. Indeed, historians are discovering that many indigenous African practices have significant merit, not only in the African context, but also in terms of the western >scientific= paradigm. Moreover, while many traditions and customs persist over time we must consider why this was the case. In some instances, traditions have been resurrected from the past or reinvented to serve new needs.