

Africa: An Introductory Survey

Spring 2008

This course explores Africa from the perspectives of several disciplines. For this reason, it is African Languages and Literature 277; Afro-American Studies 277; Anthropology 277; Geography 277; History 277; Political Science 277; and Sociology 277.

Instructor

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office hours: Tuesday, 2:30 – 3:30
Wednesday, 1:30 – 2:30

If these office hours don't work for you but you want to talk, I am available at other times; just make an appointment. For quick things, I'm usually happy and available to chat before or after lecture. As for email, it is inefficient to communicate about substance this way. Anyway, I'd rather meet you in person than correspond electronically. Use email only if you have a question that can be answered in ten seconds or less, or else use it to set up an appointment to meet.

Lectures

By long custom, this interdisciplinary course draws on guest lectures from a variety of Wisconsin faculty members engaged in the study of Africa. My preference is to take responsibility for most of the lectures myself (the course is more coherent this way), but I have carefully slotted about a dozen guest specialists to cover subjects that they can handle better than I. There will be enough guests to ensure the interdisciplinary variety this course is known for, but not so many that the course spins out of my control or away from our principal themes.

I have elected this time to devote a considerable portion of our course to HIV/AIDS in Africa, mainly because the subject is pivotal to understanding contemporary Africa, but also because two great books have appeared in recent months (Epstein and Nolen, see below) that elucidate HIV/AIDS in Africa intelligently, and I want you to read them. There is a risk when we focus a lot of attention on a depressing subject such as HIV/AIDS that students will grow gloomy about Africa and the course will reinforce the pessimistic biases of our popular culture. I am willing to take this risk. The subject is that important. But I'd like you to know right from the beginning that we will be looking seriously at HIV/AIDS because it is a major problem, but also because the struggles of Africans to confront the problem tell us a great deal in a general way about education, science, culture, religion, and politics on the African continent today. In other words, HIV/AIDS is an important subject in its own right, but we will be using it as a lens to explore a range of African realities.

This is a survey course. It draws from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. You bear an unusual burden in a course as broad as this. You are asked to make cross-disciplinary linkages regularly in your own mind in order to arrive at a basic understanding of the historical and contemporary realities of life in Africa. You are asked to be supple and open to different approaches, styles, and perspectives. You will have plenty of material to work with, and help from your teaching assistant and me, but ultimately it is up to you to draw a coherent understanding of Africa out of the material we present. When you listen to a lecture, concentrate on the subject at hand, but think at the same time about how the ideas being presented connect with earlier lectures, support them, or seem to contradict them. And always contrast the lectures with your readings.

I expect faithful attendance at all lectures. We meet in lecture on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00-2:15, in 165 Bascom Hall.

Discussion Sections

In addition to lectures twice a week, each student will attend a weekly discussion section. You must be formally enrolled in one of the twelve scheduled discussion sections and attend **that** section every week. If you are not enrolled in a discussion section, you are not enrolled in the course. Each discussion section will be the responsibility of one of our three teaching assistants. The teaching assistants are graduate students who have had considerable life experience in Africa and are carrying out Africa-related research toward a Ph.D. degree. In discussion section they will help you review and sort out ideas presented in lectures, lead discussion and debate, help you analyze your readings, administer a quiz or two, and help you prepare for exams. They are:

Geraldine O'Mahony, Political Science
Florence Ebila, African Languages and Literature
Sarah Park, History

Their office location and hours will be announced.

Required Reading

All students are required to buy the following items, available at the Underground Textbook Exchange, on State Street. Note please that the publisher is reprinting the Helen Epstein book and it will not arrive at Underground Textbook Exchange until the end of February. You may wait till then to buy it because you will not need to read it until March.

1. A. Gordon and D. Gordon, *Understanding Contemporary Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001).
2. Helen Epstein, *The Invisible Cure: Africa, the West, and the Fight Against AIDS* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2007).
3. Stephanie Nolen, *28: Stories of AIDS in Africa* (Knopf Canada, 2007)
4. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (any edition is acceptable)
5. Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying: A Novel* (any edition is acceptable)
6. *Granta: The View From Africa*, issue 92, Winter 2005.
7. *Africa 277 Course Reader* (Underground Textbook Exchange)

Reading assignments are listed in the weekly schedule, below. You are expected to do all of the reading. You cannot do well on exams unless you have read everything that has been assigned. Your reading assignments are pegged to corresponding lectures in a logical way, but rarely will the reading merely repeat what a lecture has covered. Lectures and readings are intended to be complementary.

Both of the novels (Achebe and Mda) will be the subject of one discussion section. Bring questions about other readings to discussion: If you are having trouble understanding something, other students probably are having trouble too, so don't be afraid to raise questions. That said, everything I have assigned is quite readable, even enjoyable.

Graded Work

There will be **two exams**, a mid-term on Tuesday, March 11th, in class, and the final, scheduled for Wednesday, May 14th at 2:45 P.M.. Alternate exam times will be available for students who are ill. Wishing to leave town early is not normally an acceptable reason for a separate exam. If you have an unusual conflict or problem, see me before the test. The exams will probably involve essay writing only. My current plan is for the mid-term to contain three questions, the final exam four. Each question should be answerable in 20-30 minutes of sustained writing.

Every student also will write a **five-page paper**, to be handed in at lecture on Tuesday, April 15th. The paper assignment will be given out in February, but I want the paper handed in on April 15th, not before, not after.

The course will be graded on a 100-point scale, 24 points for the mid-term, 24 for the paper, 32 for the final exam, and 20 for discussion session attendance, participation, and quizzes. Perfect attendance will work best for you, but for grading purposes you will be allowed to miss two discussion sections for any reason without penalty. Each subsequent absence, no matter the reason for it (health or otherwise), will be penalized at the rate of one point per absence.

Grades

If you have come to the course expecting a high grade for modest effort, you have chosen badly and should drop now. There is nothing inherently difficult about our material, but there is a lot of it. You will have to work to master it. About ten percent of students earn an A in this course, another 10 percent AB, and 30 to 40 percent B. In other words, almost half of enrolled students (and all of you are smart, so this means almost half of the smart students) will receive a grade less than B. High grades correlate strongly with hours spent reading and attendance at lecture and discussion section. Again, there is nothing particularly hard about what we will be doing this semester except for the time that you will need to put in to master a lot of material, **especially time reading**. Attend all lectures, read every word that has been assigned, and your grade is likely to be high. Attend and read intermittently and your grade is likely to be low.

We take grading seriously and rarely make egregious mistakes. If you believe we have made a grading error, please see your TA or me, but only under the following conditions: (1) At least **two days** have elapsed since you received your grade; (2) No more than **two weeks** have elapsed since you received your grade; (3) You are polite, respectful, and fully aware that inevitably there is some element of subjectivity in assessing written work.

With a little space left here at the bottom of the page, I'd like to say something additional about subjectivity in grading and the element of chance in life in general: You will benefit sometimes from subjectivity and chance, just as sometimes you will be hurt by it. A graceful life is accepting of this reality. When you leave the university, your *grace point average* will be a far more valuable asset than that other GPA. Like all of the very best UW students you should be working on it.

Schedule

Week 1

Tu 22 Jan. The idea of Africa
James Delehanty

Th 24 Jan. Climate and biogeography
James Delehanty

Reading:

- Course reader: Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Savages, Animals, Heathens, Races,” chapter 2 in *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992).
- Course reader: David Northrup, “First Sights – Lasting Impressions,” pp. 1-23 in *Africa’s Discovery of Europe* (New York: Oxford, 2002).
- Course reader: Mungo Park, chapters 1 and 2 in *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (1799).
- Gordon and Gordon, chapters 1 (“Introduction”) and 2 (Jeffrey Neff, “Africa: A Geographic Preface”).
- *Granta*: John Ryle, “Introduction: The Many Voices of Africa” and Binyavanga Wainaina, “How to Write about Africa.”

Week 1 discussion section topic: introductions / map quiz preparation

Week 2

Tu 29 Jan. Environment and economic life in pre-colonial Africa
James Delehanty

Th 31 Jan. Social and political organization in pre-colonial Africa
James Delehanty

Reading:

- Course reader: Mahir Saul, “Economic Life in African Villages and Towns,” pp. 190-210 in P. Martin and P. O’Meara, *Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994).
- Course reader: John McCall, “Social Organization in Africa,” pp. 175-189 in P. Martin and P. O’Meara, *Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994).

Week 2 discussion section topic: precolonial Africa

Week 3

Tu 5 Feb. From the slave trade to colonial rule
James Delehanty

Th 7 Feb. Colonialism: what it was and how it worked
James Delehanty

Reading:

- Gordon and Gordon, chapter 3 (Thomas O'Toole, "The Historical Context")
- Course reader: John Reader, chapters 36-39 in *Africa: A Biography of the Continent* (New York: Vintage, 1997).
- Course reader: Barbara Isaacman and Allen Isaacman, "Slavery and Social Stratification among the Sena of Mozambique," pp. 105-120 in Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977).
- Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Week 3 discussion section topic: the slave trade

Week 4

Tu 12 Feb. A settler colony: Kenya
James Delehanty

Th 14 Feb. A case study of colonial authority and disregard: Congo
James Sweet (History)

Reading:

- Course reader: Sheldon Gellar, "The Colonial Era," pp. 135-155 in P. Martin and P. O'Meara, *Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994).

Week 4 discussion section topic: Achebe, Things Fall Apart

Week 5

Tu 19 Feb. Colonialism and confidence in culture and self
James Delehanty

Th 21 Feb. How colonialism ended
James Delehanty

Reading:

- Course reader: Basil Davidson, pp. 22-43 in *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History* (Harlowe: Longman, 1994).

- *Granta*: Santu Mofokeng, “The Black Albums” and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Master.”

Week 5 discussion section topic: colonialism

Week 6

Tu 26 Feb. Postcolonial politics, 1960 - 2008
Michael Schatzberg (Political Science)

Th 28 Feb. Postcolonial economies 1: the idea and practice of development
James Delehanty

Reading:

- Gordon and Gordon, chapters 4 (Donald Gordon, “African Politics”) and 6 (Peter Schraeder, “African International Relations”).
- *Granta*: Kwame Dawes, “Passport Control,” Daniel Bergner, “Policeman to the World,” and Moses Isegawa, “The War of the Ears.”
- Course reader: George Ayittey, “Why Africa is Poor,” chapter 1 in G. Ayittey, *Africa Unchained: the Blueprint for Africa’s Future* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

Week 6 discussion section topic: African politics

Week 7

Tu 4 Mar. Postcolonial economies 2: ways forward
James Delehanty

Th 6 Mar. Religion in post-colonial Africa
James Delehanty

Reading:

- Course reader: Jeffrey Sachs, “The Voiceless Dying,” chapter 10 in *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: Penguin, 2005).
- *Granta*: Geert van Kestern, “The Ogiek,” and Lindsey Hilsum, “We Love China”
- Gordon and Gordon, Chapters 10 (A. Gordon, “Women and Development”) and 13 (A. Gordon and D. Gordon, “Trends and Prospects”)
- Gordon and Gordon, chapter 11 (Ambrose Moyo, “Religion in Africa”)

Week 7 discussion section topic: economic development

Week 8

Tu	11 Mar.	Mid-Term Exam
Th	13 Mar.	Health and disease in post-colonial Africa James Delehanty

Reading:

- Gordon and Gordon, chapter 7 (April Gordon, “Population, Urbanization, and AIDS”)
- Epstein, preface and chapters 1-4

Week 8 discussion section topic: discussion sections do not meet

SPRING BREAK

Week 9

Tu	25 Mar.	HIV/AIDS 1: A history of the epidemic in Africa Rick Keller (Medical History and Bioethics)
Th	27 Mar.	HIV/AIDS 4: A Uganda case study Cynthia Haq (Family Medicine)

Reading:

- Epstein, chapters 5-15, and Epilogue

Week 9 discussion section topic: HIV/AIDS I

Week 10

Tu	1 Apr.	HIV/AIDS 3: Access to essential medicines in South Africa Heinz Klug (Law)
Th	3 Apr.	HIV/AIDS 2: A Malawi case study Claire Wendland (Anthropology)

Reading:

- Stephanie Nolen, *28: Stories of AIDS in Africa* (read the book)

Week 10 discussion section topic: HIV/AIDS II

Week 11

Tu 8 Apr. HIV/AIDS 5: Challenges to the health professions in Africa
Frank Graziano (Rheumatology, General Medicine: TENTATIVE)

Th 10 Apr. HIV/AIDS 6: HIV/AIDS and the media
Jo Ellen Fair (Journalism and Mass Communication)

Reading:

- Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying* (read the novel this week and next)

Week 11 discussion section topic: HIV/AIDS III

Week 12

Tu 15 Apr. Less doom, less gloom: Africa is not a basket-case
James Delehanty

Th 17 Apr. African oral traditions
Harold Scheub (African Languages and Literature)

Reading:

- Gordon and Gordon, chapter 12 (George Joseph, "African Literature")
- Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying* (finish the novel before discussion section)

Week 12 discussion section topic: Mda, Ways of Dying

Week 13

Tu 22 Apr. Popular culture in urban Africa
Jo Ellen Fair (Journalism and Mass Communication)

Th 24 Apr. Music and life: a griot family
James Delehanty (with film: Great, Great Great Grandparents' Music)

Reading:

- Course reader: Dele Jegede, "Popular Culture in Urban Africa," pp. 273-294 in P. Martin and P. O'Meara, *Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
- Course reader: Jo Ellen Fair, "Me Do Wu," My Val: The Creation of Valentine's Day in Accra, Ghana," *African Studies Review*, vol. 47, pp. 23-49.

Week 13 discussion section topic: popular culture

Week 14

Tu 29 Apr A language and culture study: Swahili
Magdalena Hauner (African Languages and Literature)

Th 1 May African cinema
Aliko Songolo

Reading:

- none

Week 14 discussion topic: language in Africa

Week 15

Tu 6 May Performing visual arts
Henry Drewal (Art History and Afro-American Studies)

Th 8 May Conclusion
James Delehanty

Reading:

- None

Week 15 discussion topic: review