

CIVILIZATIONS OF AFRICA (SIS 250 – 001)
American University, School of International Service

Fall 2008
Room: Ward 302
Mondays and Thursdays, 2:10 – 3:25
TA: Maggie Skinner

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Office hrs: Mon. 10-12/Th. 9-12

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a brief introduction to Africa’s people, societies, and cultures. Many of the readings are historical in nature and we will begin by exploring some of the earliest evidence of humanity and the achievements of the first civilizations. This will require us to integrate knowledge accumulated through archaeology, art, history and a variety disciplines.

Our learning goals for the course include: (1) identifying variation among and the accomplishments of important African civilizations; (2) analyzing the broad developmental effects of demography and geography on technological innovation, political survival, and social change; (3) exploring the adaptation and diffusion of knowledge; and (4) discussing the complex interactions between indigenous traditions and external influences such as European imperialism.

The course also incorporates a unique collaboration with students enrolled in “African Civilizations” at American University of Nigeria (AUN). While only one assignment actually requires you to engage in online dialogue, you are encouraged to help construct a “classroom without walls” by posting other messages. The blog is located at: [_____](#). Please contact the TA if you have any technical problems.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

***Sundiata* essay** – Write a short essay, 2 – 3 pages in length, addressing one of the major themes in *Sundiata* (10 % of grade). This is due on September 22.

Interpretive essay – Write a short essay (2 – 3 pages) that draws upon course materials in order to interpret one of the African myths of origin posted on Blackboard. You will have to turn in a hardcopy and you will also have to post a one paragraph summary in the discussion forum on Blackboard (see below). Due on October 2. (15 % of course grade).

Message postings – You are required to post several specific messages during the course. Please remember to sign your name when you post a message:

Myth summary – Post a one paragraph summary of your essay online and come to class prepared to discuss your response with other students.

Slavery – You should actively and thoughtfully participate in the online discussion about slavery. You must post by Wednesday, October 14. (10% of course grade.)

Final paper topic – Briefly describe your topic in the designated Blackboard discussion forum. Take advantage of this opportunity to describe any challenges you are facing.

Final project – is due on November 24 (25% of grade). You have two very different options:

Research paper option: Write a short research paper on an African civilization of your choice. If you choose to write about a broad theme it should be approved in advance by the professor. An annotated bibliography is due on October 16. Your final paper grade will incorporate this assignment so please remember to attach it to the final paper.

Community-based learning: Volunteer or intern with an organization working on Africa and keep a journal. AU's Community Service Center (CSC) can help you identify an appropriate organization. You may also want to look at the NGOs on my Facebook profile. Additional information is posted on Blackboard under course documents. The first part of your journal is due on October 16.

Class participation – 10 percent. This incorporates your electronic postings but you are still expected to participate in class.

Final Exam – the in-class final exam is on December 8 from 2:10 – 4:40 (30% of your grade).

Required Readings: Required readings are indicated below. Readings posted on Blackboard have an *asterisk. The following required books are available at the campus bookstore:

- Collins, Robert and James Burns. 2007. *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Niane, D.T. 2006. *Sundiata* (Revised Edition). Essex: Longman.
- Laitin, David. 1992. *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hari, Daoud. 2008. *The Translator: A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur*. Random House.
- Achebe, Chinua. 1959. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books (1995 edition).

Recommended books on reserve in the library:

- Iliffe, John. 2007. *Africans: The History of a Continent*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. (second edition)
- Davidson, Basil. 1991. *Africa in History* (Revised and Expanded Edition). New York: Simon and Schuster.

(1) Course Overview (August 25)

(2) The Peopling of a Continent (August 28)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 1, "The Historical Geography of Africa"

*Iliffe, John. Chapter 2, "The Emergence of Food Producing Communities," in *Africans*.

Recommended:

* Wilford, John. "Kenya Fossils Challenge Linear Evolution of Homo Sapiens," *New York Times*, August 9, 2007.

→ **No class:** Labor Day Holiday (September 1)

(3) Egypt, Ethiopia, and North Africa (September 4)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 2, "Kingdoms on the Nile"

Recommended:

Davidson, Chapter 2, "Ancient Glories" (pp. 25 – 60)
Iliffe, Chapter 3, "The Impact of Metals"

(4) Agriculture and Iron (September 8)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 3, "The Peoples of sub-Saharan Africa," and Chapter 4, "Crops, Cows, and Iron"

Recommended:

Davidson, Chapter 3, "The Factors of Growth," (pages 61 – 87)
Iliffe, Chapter 6, "Colonising Society in Eastern and Southern Africa"

(5) Aksum and the New Faiths (September 11)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 5, "Northeast Africa in the Age of Aksum"
Start reading *Sundiata*

Recommended:

Iliffe, Chapter 4, "Christianity and Islam"
Davidson, Chapter 3, (pages 116 – 139)

(6) Mali, Songhai, Ghana (September 15)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 6, "Empires of the Plains"
Continue reading *Sundiata*

(7) Discussion of Sundiata (September 18)

Finish reading *Sundiata*

(8) East Africa and the Great Lakes (September 22)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 7 "East Africa," and Chapter 8, "The Lake Plateau" (skim 122 – 127)

→ Sundiata paper due

→ VIDEO: *Africa: A History Denied* by Time Life (VHS 5178)

(9) Early West African Empires (September 25)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 9, "Societies and States of the West African Forest"

* Usuanlele, Uyilawam. 2005. "Precolonial Benin: A Political Economy Perspective," in *Precolonial Nigeria*, edited by Ogundiran. Trenton: Africa World Press.

Recommended:

Davidson, Chapter 3, "The Factors of Growth," (pages 87 – 116)
Iliffe, Chapter 5, "Colonising Society in Western Africa"

(10) Southern Africa and the Tropical Kingdoms of Central Africa (September 29)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 10, "Kingdoms and Trade in Central Africa," and Chapter 11, "People and States of Southern Africa"

Recommended:

Davidson, Chapter 4, "Tropical Achievement" (pp. 141 – 183)

* Nziem, Ndaywel, "The Political System of the Luba and the Lunda," in *General History of Africa, Volume V: Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, edited by B.A. Ogot. UNESCO and Heinemann, 1992.

(11) African Myths of Origin (October 2)

(12) Slavery in Africa (October 6)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 12, “The Arrival of Europeans” and Chapter 14, “Slavery in Africa”

→ Video in class: *Wonders of the African World* (DVD 3698)

(13) East Coast and West Coast Trade (October 9)

Chapter 15, “Atlantic Slave Trade,” and Chapter 16, “Asian Slave Trade”

Recommended:

Davidson, Chapter 5, “New Encounters,” (pages 190 – 216)

Iiffe, Chapter 7, “The Atlantic Slave Trade”

(14) The Consequences of Slavery (October 13)

“The Legacy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade” hearing by Constitution Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee, available at <http://judiciary.house.gov/oversight.aspx?ID=400>.

Read the testimony by Charles Ogletree and Thomas Wells.

Recommended:

Materials from The Sentencing Project posted on Blackboard

(15) Portuguese Decline and the birth of South Africa (October 16)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 19, “Africans, Dutch, and the British in South Africa”

Recommended:

Davidson, Chapter 6, “Towards the Crisis of Today,” (pages 255 – 275)

→ Annotated bibliography for paper option 1 due. Draft diary for paper option 2 due.

(16) The Colonial Era and the Scramble (October 20)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 18 “European Conquest,” and Chapter 20, “European Colonial Rule”

Recommended:

Davidson, “Conquest and Colonial Rule” (pages 275 – 307)

Iiffe, Chapter 9, “Colonial Invasion” and Chapter 10, “Colonial Change, 1918 – 1950”

(17) Responses to Colonialism: Rural Rebellion in Kenya (October 23)

* Throup, D.W. 1985. “The Origins of Mau Mau,” *African Affairs* 84 (July 1985): 399-433.

* wa Thiong’o, Ngugi. 1983. “Declaration of War in Kenya,” reprinted in *Barrel of a Pen*.
Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

(18) Igbo Society (October 27)

Achebe, Chapters 1 – 5

* Uchendu, Victor. 1965. Chapter 5, “Founding a New Family,” in *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*. Holt, Rinehart.

(19) Falling Apart (October 30)

Achebe, Chapters 6 – 13

Yeats, W. B. “The Second Coming.” Available at: <http://www.online-literature.com/yeats/780/>

(20) Meeting the Missionaries (November 3)

Achebe, Chapters 14 – end

Recommended:

Collins and Burns, Chapter 17, “Prelude to the European Conquest of Africa”

* Harneit-Sievers, Axel. 2006. Chapter 4, “Town People and Church People: The Impact of Christianity”

(21) Introduction to Darfur (November 6)

Start reading Hari

(22) Cultural and Political Dimensions of Darfur (November 10)

Finish reading Hari

(23) Language Repertoires and Politics (November 13)

Laitin, Chapters 1 and 2

(24) Understanding Language Outcomes (November 17)

Laitin, Chapters 4 and 5.

(25) Language and State Construction (November 20)

Laitin, Chapters 6 – 7.

(26) Final projects due (November 24)

Class presentations.

→ Thanksgiving Holiday, November 27

(27) Civilizations of Africa (December 1)

Class presentations.

(28) Course review (December 4)

IN-CLASS FINAL EXAM, DECEMBER 8 FROM 2:10 – 4:40