

History of Africa before 1500

HIST 330-711
Spring 2022

Dr. Selena Sanderfer Doss
Web Course

Course Description

This course examines African history chronologically from the prehistoric era to 16th century with an emphasis on the major geographic, cultural, political, and economic character of particular regions. In addition to chronicling internal state development, it also examines African states' within the larger context of World history and their interaction with Asia and Europe polities. Students will analyze primary source material and identify major themes and controversies in the historiography of early African history. In seeking to connect past events with current circumstances, this course will also critically examine contemporary myths and misconceptions about Africa and its history.

Required Texts

Erik Gilbert and Jonathan Reynolds, *Africa in World History: From Prehistory to the Present* (New York: Pearson Publishers, 2012) ISBN: 9780205053995

Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia and Trevor R. Getz, *African Histories: New Sources and New Techniques for Studying African Pasts* (New York: Pearson Publishers, 2011) ISBN: 9780136155584

Nwando Achebe, *Female Monarchs and Merchant Queens in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020) ISBN: 9780821440803 (Also available as an e-book at the WKU library)

Choose only ONE of the following texts for the final term paper:

D.T. Niane, *Sundiata: Epic of Old Mali* (London: Longmans Publishers, 1965) ISBN: 9781405849425

E. A. Wallis Budge and Miguel F. Brooks, *Kebra Nagast (The Glory of Kings)* (Asmara: Third World Press/Red Sea Press, 1996) ISBN: 9789766102272

Daniel P. Biebuyck and Kahombo C. Mateene, *Mwindo Epic from the Banyanga (Congo Republic)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) ISBN: 9780520020498

Thomas A. Hale, Nouhou Malio and Mounkaila Maiga, *Epic of Askia Mohammed* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) ISBN: 9780253209900

Lee Haring, *How to Read a Folktale: The Ibonia Epic from Madagascar* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2013) ISBN: 9781909254053

[Other readings and handouts as announced in class]

Course Objectives

This course helps fulfill undergraduate requirements for an upper division course in an area other than Europe or the United States for history and social studies majors and/or minors.

- Students will identify the major historical themes in African history before 1500
- Students will evaluate trends within African historiography and the teaching of African history
- Students assess the role of the environment in African history
- Students will describe arguments for and against racial prejudice towards Africans in the ancient and medieval eras
- Students will identify major political states in Africa before 1500
- Students will describe the spread of Islam in Africa and the Africanization of Islam
- Students will recount a chronology of African history before the era of the height of Atlantic Slave Trade
- Students will analyze primary and secondary source texts on African history
- Students will effectively communicate their ideas in oral and written formats

Course Goals

- Critical thinking: prepare students to make informed decisions and ethical choices by examining historical examples
- Informed citizenship: develop knowledge of and concern for a multicultural world
- Historical perspective: increase awareness of how personal bias and opinion shape historical analysis
- Social engagement: encourage students to become actively engaged in issues affecting their lives and those others around the world

Academic Honesty

In all aspects of this course, students are required to demonstrate academic honesty and integrity as outlined in the University Statement on Student Rights and Responsibilities (WKU Catalog, 333-5). Violations of this include:

- Cheating by giving, sharing, or receiving unauthorized information before, during, or after an exam or assignment, whether verbal, written, code, or via electronic device used to read notes or search for information on the internet
- Dishonesty, including misrepresentation or lying
- Plagiarism, including memorizing and recanting work or answers from online sources or textbooks

Penalties for academic dishonesty as noted in the WKU Catalog and in Hilltopics: Handbook for University Life: “Students who commit any act of academic dishonesty may receive from the instructor a failing grade in that portion of the course work in which the act is detected or a failing grade in the course without possibility of withdrawal. The faculty member may also present the case to the Office of the Dean of Student Life for disciplinary sanctions.” See also <https://www.wku.edu/studentconduct/>. Cases of academic dishonesty may be referred to The

Office of Judicial Affairs for review, where the sanctions for academic dishonesty outlined in the WKU Student Handbook and available online at <http://www.wku.edu/judicialaffairs/sanctions.php> may be applied.

Citation format must conform to Chicago Manual of Style. Information detailing this format can be found the History Department's Style Sheet for Citations available online at <http://www.wku.edu/history/documents/wku-history-citation-guide.pdf>.

Online Etiquette:

I fully expect each student to demonstrate a degree of online etiquette that reflects being a respectful adult in our society. Remember that discussion boards are a free space, where students should feel comfortable sharing ideas and asking questions without judgment. Students and faculty have personal beliefs, but should be cognizant of others' beliefs as well. Please respectfully disagree and do not resort to any personal criticisms.

Also, please use proper written communication in all correspondence. Email communication is not a text message and should use proper greetings, closings, and titles when addressing each other and faculty. This type of etiquette is beneficial when learning how to respectfully communicate with your peers, colleagues and superiors in the other settings.

Time Management:

This course is both reading and writing intensive. Although it is an online course, students should expect to spend 8-10 hours per week reading, writing, and researching assignments. Student who do not have a disciplined study regiment or who cannot manage time efficiently will have a difficult time successfully completing this course.

Technological Requirements:

This course requires students to have regular access to the internet. The course site and email should be checked multiple times per week, if not every day. If wishing to print reading assignments, access to a printer is necessary as is a word processing program that allows users to create complex formatting such as footnotes and italic style for documents.

Grading and Requirements:

- 30% Reading Responses (3 at 10% each)
- 10% Book Review
- 10% Racism Debate
- 25% Oral Epic Project
 - Epic Choice and Bibliography – 5%
 - Annotated Bibliography – 5%
 - Outline and Thesis – 5%
 - Paper - 15%]
- 10% Exams (2 at 5% each)
- 10% Participation [video responses, blackboard discussion question responses, classwork]

90-100 (A, A-); 80-89 (B+, B, B-); 70-79 (C+, C, C-); 60-69 (D+, D, D-), 0-59 (E)

Your grade on blackboard does not always show the correct average for this class. Please use the percentage points listed above when calculating your class average.

For example: Paper #1 85 (.10) = 8.75

Exam #1 90 (.15) = 13.5

= 8.75 + 13.5

= 22.25

= 22.25/25 (total amount of percentage points earned so far)

= 89.00 average grade so far

KEEP ALL GRADED WORK INCLUDING PARTICIPATION GRADES

Assignments:

All assignments are due by 11:59 pm Sunday at the end of the week that they are assigned.

Reading Responses:

Each student will need to complete three reading responses. In the responses, students will have the responsibility of either analyzing the research problem, identifying the thesis, or critiquing the sources. Entries should be 300-600 words in length. If multiple articles or chapters are assigned, students should discuss all the assigned readings for the week. They should be double spaced, use 12 pt. font size and a standard font style such as Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, etc. Responses should use quotations and footnotes with Chicago Manual of Style citation format. A fuller explanation of reading responses can be found in the Information section of blackboard. Late entries will be accepted with a 10 pt. deduction per day it is overdue.

Book Review:

A book review of Nwando Achebe, *Female Monarchs and Merchant Queens in Africa* is required. A book reviews should provide a brief summary of the reading. In addition, it should state what questions/research problems the author seeks to address, name the authors' primary arguments/theses, and discuss the use of sources, the book's organization and any problems or shortcomings. They should be 600-900 words in length, double spaced, use 12 pt. font size and a standard font style. Responses should use quotations and footnotes with Chicago Manual of Style citation format. Late entries will be accepted with a 10 pt. deduction per day it is overdue. A fuller explanation of reading responses can be found in the Information section of blackboard.

Racism Debate

Each student will examine a set of primary sources related to European and/or Arab beliefs about Africans during the ancient and medieval eras and argue whether it supports or opposes the assertion that racism against Africans existed. An outline of the argument will be assessed using a rubric. Outlines should be at 1-2 pages or 300-600 words in length. They should be double spaced, use 12 pt. font size and a standard font style such as Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, etc. Late entries will be accepted with a 10 pt. deduction per day it is overdue. A fuller explanation of Racism Debate can be found on blackboard.

Oral Epic Project:

The Oral Epic Project will require students to examine one African oral epic in depth and present a historical argument. They will work together to present the presentation, but will write papers individually. Within this project students address four elements: 1) the epic's background, 2) historical accuracy, 3) insights into social structure and 4) larger function within society.

- 1) Consider the background or context of the oral epic and questions relating to which ethnic group does it belong, how is it performed, when is it thought to have originated, and when was it observed or recorded.
- 2) When discussing historical accuracy evaluate if the personalities and/or events in the epic are real or imaginary, is the person or circumstance corroborated by other primary accounts, is the portrayal bias.

The third and fourth requirements will form the major argumentative portions of the paper.

- 3) Note what insights the epic can reveal regarding the social structure of a society such as what is the role of Islam, Christianity or indigenous African religion and what can be learned regarding gender or class structures.
- 4) Explain the larger social function of the epic in a given society and analyze how it serves to unify a group of peoples, legitimize a leader, and characterize resistance or relations to outsiders.

All of the possible considerations for portions 3) and 4) do not have to be included in a thesis. Instead, the thesis should go more in depth about a particular consideration and present an organized argument. Below is a list of epics from which students may choose for their project:

- *Epic of Sunjata*
- *The Kebra Negast*
- *The Mwindo Epic*
- *The Epic of Askia Mohammed*
- *Ibonia: Epic of Madagascar*

Epic Choice and Bibliography:

An initial bibliography must also be submitted along with the chosen African oral epic. Students must examine at least 5 sources including secondary sources such as monographs, articles or chapters in an edited book. Do not use encyclopedia articles or summaries from websites. All articles must come from peer reviewed academic journals and monographs should be published by academic or university presses. Citation format must conform to Chicago Manual of Style.

Annotated Bibliography:

Students must examine at least 5 different secondary sources (monographs or articles) related to their chosen oral epic. Do not use encyclopedia articles or summaries from websites. All articles must come from peer reviewed academic journals and books published by academic presses. The use of the sources must demonstrate an effort to find diverse point of views and

arguments. Annotated bibliographies provide a succinct overview of each of the secondary sources consulted for the project. Secondary sources should cover the actual epic, ethnic group, religious culture or historical figures. Each annotation should be about 100 words and use CMS bibliography citation format. The following questions may be asked, but you do not necessarily need to answer each question directly.

- What is the central argument of the text in question? Try to summarize that argument in a sentence or two.
- What do you consider problematic, and point out other authors whose works might better explain or clarify that problem?
- Did you notice any connections between this text and other texts on your list? Were there related ideas? Did one text attempt to comment on or correct another?
- How will you use this source in your research?

Outline and Thesis:

Develop a working outline for your paper that addresses the four requirements. While it is necessary to include historical context (requirements 1 and 2), the majority of the paper should develop your argument (requirements 3 and 4). The thesis statement should briefly detail the major points of the argument. Divide the outline into introduction, main body paragraphs, and conclusion sections in order to help organize your thoughts. Outlines should be at least 300 words and include several quotes with accompanying footnote citations. It is unnecessary to include all quotations that you intend to use in the paper; rather seven or eight will suffice. Outline instructions and samples can be found on blackboard.

Paper: Papers should present an argument that is supported by evidence. It should also include a short review of the literature that has already been written on the subject. Papers must be 8-10 pages in length, use CMS footnote citation format, double spaced, use 12pt. font size and a standard font style such as Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, etc. Sources should be listed in a bibliography. A grading rubric can be found on blackboard.

Participation:

Video responses, classwork and blackboard discussion question responses will count toward your participation grade. Video responses should address a specific prompt or question. They should be at least 100 words, include specific details and not a general summary. Discussion responses on blackboard should be no less than 100 words and reference the readings using direct quotations. Various classwork assignments will be given throughout the semester. Answers to each question should be at least 50 words and use direct quotations. Each video response, class work assignment, and discussion question will be worth 25-50 points.

Exams:

Exams will be comprised of short answer and essay questions drawn from lectures, the textbook, videos and document readings. There will be a total of two exams. The due date for each exam is 11:59 pm., Sunday, at the end of the week that it is assigned.

Student Disability Service

In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or

auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, 1074. SARC can be reached by phone number at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at sarc.connect@wku.edu. Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a faculty notification letter (FNL) from The Student Accessibility Resource Center.”

Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy

Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU’s Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) at

<https://wku.edu/eoo/documents/titleix/wkutitleixpolicyandgrievanceprocedure.pdf> and

Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040) at

https://wku.edu/policies/hr_policies/2040_discrimination_harassment_policy.pdf.

Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121. Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are “Responsible Employees” of the University and MUST report what you share to WKU’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU’s Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.

Contact Information:

Email: selena.sanderfer@wku.edu (Do not send messages to my topper student email account!)

Schedule

Week One

1/17-1/23

African Geography

Video Response: Basil Davidson, *Africa - Different but Equal*

Discussion Question: What are some of the myths and distortions held about Africa?

Reading: Keim and Somerville, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, Part One, 3-31; Gilbert and Reynolds, *Africa in World History*, Chapter 2, 16-22

Week Two

1/24-1/30

Origins of Humanity

Video Response: Henry Louis Gates, *Africa’s Great Civilizations - Origins*

Discussion Question: Which racist notion about “Darkest Africa” has been the most enduring? What is its origin and what are its implications in the modern day attitudes and policies towards Africa?

Readings: Keim and Somerville, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, Part Two, 36-98; Gilbert and Reynolds, *Africa in World History*, Chapter 1, 5-15

Week Three
1/31-2/6

Agriculture, Pastoralism and Metallurgy

Classwork: Brizuela-Garcia and Getz, *African Histories*, Chapter 1, 1-18

Video Response: Peter Schmidt, *Tree of Iron*

Reading Response #1 Thesis

Readings: Gilbert and Reynolds, *African in World History*, Chapter 2, 23-36 and Chapter 4, 61-66; Judith Carney, "The African Antecedents of Uncle Ben in U.S. Rice History," *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 29 no. 1 (2003): 1-21

Week Four
2/7-2/13

Culture and Bantu Migrations

Classwork: Brizuela-Garcia and Getz, *African Histories*, Chapter 3, 39-57

Classwork: Creation Stories

Classwork: Basil Davidson

Video Response: Ali Mazrui, *The Africans – Legacy of Lifestyles*

Readings: Basil Davidson, *The African Genius*, Social Charters, 45-120; Gilbert and Reynolds, *Africa in World History*, Chapter 4, 55-60 and 66-70

Week Five
2/14-2/20

Egypt and Nubia

Classwork: Brizuela-Garcia and Getz, *African Histories*, Chapter 2, 19-37

Classwork: Proverbs and The Instruction of Amenemope; The Hymn to Aten and Psalm 104

Epic Choice and Bibliography

Readings: Gilbert and Reynolds, *Africa in World History*, Chapter 3, 37-45 and 48-54

Week Six
2/21-2/27

Hellenized North Africa and Byzantine North Africa

Discussion Question: Is Ancient Egypt a black civilization and should it be considered the foundation of western societies?

Reading Response #2 Research Problem

Readings: Gilbert and Reynolds, *African in World History*, Chapter 3, 45-50; Chek Anta Diop, "Negro Nations and Culture;" 10-16; Martin Bernal, "Black Athena: The African and Levantine Roots of Greece;" 66-82; Raymond Mauny, "Nations negres et culture – A Review," 16-22

Week Seven
2/28-3/6

Racism Debate and Exam
Racism Debate
Exam #1

Week Eight
3/7-3/13

Christianity, Aksum and Ethiopia,

Video Response: Henry Louis Gates, *Africa's Great Civilizations* – The Cross and the Crescent
Annotated Bibliography

Readings: Gilbert and Reynolds, *African in World History*, Chapters 5, 71-81

Week Nine
3/14-3/20

Spring Break

Week Ten
3/21-3/27

Islam, The Maghreb, The Swahili City States

Classwork: Brizuela-Garcia and Getz, *African Histories*, Chapter 6, 111-138

Discussion Question: Is Islam more authentically African than Christianity?

Video Response: Ali Mazrui, *Triple Heritage – Nature of a Continent*

Video Response: Henry Louis Gates, *Africa's Great Civilizations - Cities*

Reading Response #3 Methodology

Readings: Gilbert and Reynolds, *African in World History*, Chapter 6, 82-90, 96-98 and Chapter 7, 99-116; Derek Nurse, "The Contributions of Linguistics to the Study of History in Africa" *International Journal of African History* Vol.38 no. 3 (1997):359-391

Week Eleven
3/28-4/3

Trade, Hausa City States, Kanem Bornu

Video Response: Basil Davidson, *Africa - The King and the City*

Classwork: Brizuela-Garcia and Getz, *African Histories*, Chapter 4, 59-80

Readings: Gilbert and Reynolds, *African in World History*, Chapter 7, 115-116

Week Twelve
4/4-4/10

Visual Images and Oral Epics

Images of Africa Analysis
Outline and Thesis

Readings: Keim and Somerville, 135-152

Week Thirteen
4/11-4/17

Gender

Discussion Question: Is sexism indigenous to African society or is it a result of interactions with Eurasia?

Book Review

Readings: Achebe, *Female Monarchs and Merchant Queens in Africa*

Week Fourteen
4/18-4/24

Middle Age Empires, Ghana, Mali, Songhay

Video Response: Basil Davidson, *Africa – Caravans of Gold*

Readings: Gilbert and Reynolds, *African in World History*, Chapter 6, 91-95

Week Fifteen
4/25-5/1

Great Zimbabwe

Video Response: Henry Louis Gates, *Africa's Great Civilizations - Cities*
Exam #2

Week Sixteen
5/2-5/6

Finals Week

Papers due Friday, 5/6, 11:59 pm