Course Description HI588 examines the changing status of women in Africa from late Antiquity to the contemporary period. We begin the class by spending the first three sessions exploring recent works by western and African scholars that focus on the issues of gender, culture and power. During the rest of the semester we will read biographies and articles that focus on some of Africa’s outstanding female political leaders as well as groups of women whose actions illustrate other ways in which women exercised power. The readings in this section are divided into two parts. The first part deals with the period from late Antiquity to colonial conquest and the readings highlight the variety of political positions that women held and the role that culture-particularly religious rituals played in their ability to gain and exercise power. This section of the course also investigates the ways that wives, concubines and other groups of women used their social position to empower themselves and their heirs. The second part of the course shifts to the colonial and post-colonial periods and examines how women contested new colonial gender categories that privileged males and how they came to control some sectors of the colonial economy. These readings also examine how women used religion and rituals to join and at times compete with their male counterparts in the various anti-colonial struggles which led to political independence.

The approach is both conceptual and case specific. The readings range from theoretical essays on gender, patriarchy and culture to biographies of women leaders as well as historical debates on women’s political leadership. These conceptual, biographical and historical readings form the basis of the weekly presentations and discussions.

The readings and discussions will focus on the following questions and issues: How has western feminist scholarship and the emerging African feminist and womanist scholarship redefined the study of women in Africa? Is gender as a category of analysis important in the study of the history of women in Africa? How has the concept of power changed over time and how applicable are the various concepts to the study of women in Africa? To what did culture inform the way in which women exercised power in Africa during the pre-colonial period? How did women obtain, exercise and keep power in
Africa? How did European involvement in Africa during the various historical periods affect women’s access to power?

**Prerequisites:** Sophomore Status or higher

**Readings**

The required books are available for purchase at Barnes & Noble. One copy of each required book is also available on two-hour reserve at Mugar library. To obtain a list of the materials on reserve, go to [http://library.bu.edu](http://library.bu.edu) and click on Reserve Services, selecting either my name or the course number. Additional required readings from books and journals are available at Blackboard Learn. (BL)

**Academic Integrity Policy:** Each student is expected to author his/her own work. Students should familiarize themselves with the CAS Conduct Code. Students who submit plagiarized papers or other assignments that they have not authored will be subject to the penalties imposed by the CAS Conduct Code.

**Books to be purchased (Also available on Reserve at Mugar Library)**


**Course Requirements**

**Reaction Papers:** Each student must write a critical review of Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women* (due week 5) and three reaction papers based on the weekly readings for Weeks 2 through Weeks 13. For the reaction papers each students must select one week’s reading from Parts One or Two, one week’s reading from Part Three, and one week’s reading from Parts Four or Five. Each reaction paper must be 3-4 typed pages long (double spaced) and will be graded on the basis of critical evaluation of the main themes of the readings as well as for organization and coherence. Students must submit reaction papers at the beginning of the class session when the readings will be discussed. The critical of Oyewumi’s book and the three reaction papers will account for 40% of the course grade.

**Oral Presentation and Class Participation:** Each student will be required to make one formal presentation (at least 30 minutes long) on one of the weekly readings (weeks 3-13). Students should not select for their oral presentations the same week’s readings that they have selected for their reaction papers. Students who are neither making
presentations for a given week nor writing longer reaction papers are expected to read and write a one page reaction to one of the assigned readings for that week. All students are also expected to attend each class session and actively participate in class discussions. The formal presentation, one page response to the readings, and class participation will account for 20% of the course grade.

**Research Paper:** Each student will be required to write a research paper on one of the themes arising from the weekly readings and discussions. Students must consult with me before selecting a topic and undertaking research (before week 5). The research paper should be between 4,500-5,000 words (undergraduates), and around 8-9,000 words (graduate students). Research papers from students who have not consulted with the instructor will not be accepted. The research paper accounts for 40% of the final grade and is due Wednesday December 12.

**Late Weekly Reaction Papers:** These will only be accepted after individual discussions with the instructor as to the reason for the late one page reaction. Late one page reaction submissions will not receive full credit.

**Weekly Readings**

**Part One:**

**Women and Status in Africa:**

**Week 1 (9/5): Methods, Theories and Approaches I**

Jean Boydston, “Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis.” (BL)
Judith Lorber, “Feminisms” (BL)
Oyéwùmì, *The Invention of Women*, begin to page 27
One page reaction to reading (due 9/12 by email)

**Week 2 (9/12) Introduction to Mugar African Collection**

Meeting in Mugar Library 6th Floor

**Week 3 (9/19) Methods, Theories and Approaches II**

Oyéwùmì, *The Invention of Women*, pp. 27-79.
Lohwasser, “Queenship in Kush” (BL)

**Student Presentation**

**Week 4 (9/26) Methods, Theories and Theorizing III**

Oyéwùmì, *The Invention of Women*, p. 80 to end
Eugenia Herbert, *Iron, Gender and Power*, pp. 219-238 (BT).
Akyeampong and Obeng, “Spirituality, Gender, Power” (BL)
Part 11 Women, Power and Culture: Late Antiquity to 1730s

Week 5 (10/3) Women in Ancient Africa: Cleopatra, Temptress or Astute Politician
Schiff, Cleopatra: A Life
Sally Riad, “Invoking Cleopatra to examine the shifting ground of Leadership,” The Leadership Quarterly xxx (2011) (BL)
Witt, “Isis as Perceived by Women” (BL).
Student Presentation

Week 6 (10/10) The Paradox of Queen Njinga
Student Presentation

Week 7 (10/17) Visionaries and Politicians in the Kingdoms of Benin, Kongo and Ethiopia
Thornton, Dona Beatrice.
Belcher, “Sisters Debating the Jesuits,” (BL)
Student Presentations
Guest-Prof. John Thornton

Part 111 Women, Power and Culture, 1730s to European Conquest

Week 8 (10/24) African Women: Trans-cultural Relations and New Bases of Power
Hilary Jones, “From Marriage a la Mode,” (BL)
E. Francis White, “Creole Women Traders in the Nineteenth Century,” (BL)
Adu-Boahen, Kwabena, Abolition, Economic Transition, Gender and Slavery (BL)
Student Presentations

Week 9 (10/31) Queen Mothers, Warriors and Women of the Harem
Smith, Baba of Karo (begin to p. 110)
Kaplan, Queen Mothers (BL)
Lebeuf, “Women in Political Organization” (BL)
Law, “Amazons of Dahomey” (BT)

Student Presentations

Part IV African Women and the Colonial Regimes

Week 10 (11/7) Changing Notions of Status, Gender and Power
  Smith, *Baba of Karo* (continue)
  Achebe, *The Female King*, begin

Student Presentations

Guest Lecture-Prof. Lorelle Semley

Week 11 (11/14) African Women in the Colonial Economy
  Smith, *Baba of Karo* (Complete)
  Achebe, *The Female King* (complete)

Student Presentation

Week 12 (11/21)
  African Women, Health, Religion and Empowerment
  White, “They Could Make Their Victims Dull” (BL)
  Clarke Garrett, “Women and Witches”, *Signs* 3 no. 2 (1977), 461-470. (BL)

Student Presentation

Part V African Women and African Nationalism

Week 13 (12/5)
  African Women and Decolonization
  Preez Bezdrob, *Winnie Mandela: A Life* (begin to 136)

Student Presentation

Week 14 (12/12) African Women and the Wars of Liberation
  Preez Bezdrob, *Winnie Mandela: A Life* (p. 136 to end)
Flame (Movie on Zimbabwean Women and Liberation (View at Krasker Library))

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