

History 237 Reconstructing the African Past

Fall 2014

Prof. James McCann

T 9:00-12:00 (232 Bay State Road #505)

Office Hours M 10-11:30, T 1-2 or by Appointment

Office: African Studies Center, 232 Bay State Road #518

or

#347 675 Comm. Ave (Dept. of Archaeology)

(353-7308 or 3-2637)

e-mail: mccann@bu.edu

This course offers an introduction to the history of Africa from the earliest times to the eve of the African response to European colonial conquest in the late nineteenth century. The course emphasizes the investigation of the specialized methods by which historians of Africa reconstruct events and historical processes. These methods include the use of oral tradition, archaeology, linguistic analysis, and written documents. Rather than attempting a broad survey, the course concentrates on a number of case studies, including the Asante empire of Ghana, the village-level Ibo society of southeastern Nigeria, the major states of the Niger valley, Ethiopia, and the early formative history of South Africa. Through these examples of Africa's historical experience the course will provide a basic knowledge of Africa's contributions to world history and Africa's contribution to the study of history in general.



Teaching Method and Evaluation

Resources in the course consist of readings, lectures, class discussions, and films. There will also be a special collection of slides and other visual materials presented at intervals in the semester which will provide visual images of concepts being discussed. Grades will be based on performance on the mid-term, final exam, and one writing exercise.

Final grades will be determined in the following manner:

Opinion Paper	25%
Midterm	30%
Final	45%

The mid-term and final examinations will emphasize analysis, clarity of expression, and the ability to integrate course materials into answering identification and essay questions. Study guides for the exams will be distributed prior to the exams and will include sample questions from which the actual exam questions will be drawn. Sample study questions that cover the content of the midterm and final exams will be distributed in class a week before those exams. A trend of improvement over the course of the semester may also be weighed in determining a final grade.

The course will meet for 3-hour sessions once a week. That format will allow us to use a variety of styles for examining sources and substance of Africa's history. Each session will consist of one or more formats, including lecture, images, film, discussion of readings. Students will be expected to have prepared reading material comments and questions for each session.

Readings

Readings in this class will serve as background to lectures and will also be the subject of in-class discussion. Readings for a particular week should be done prior to the class periods for that week. All readings will be on reserve at the Mugar Library's Reserve Reading Room; course books will, of course, also be available at the B.U. Bookstore. Required books include:

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
 Connah, *African Civilizations*
 Collins, *Problems in African History: The Precolonial Centuries*
 Getz and Clarke, *Abina and the Important Men*
 Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*
 Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*
 Shillington, *History of Africa (Revised Edition)*
 Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*

Class Schedule and Topics

Sources for Africa's History

Week 1 (2 September)

Course Orientation and Thesis (Map Quiz defined)
Sources: Geography, Environment, and History in Africa

Assignment: Choose a map of Africa on line and bring it to class. Be prepared to justify your choice and then take a short quiz (pretest) on a list of items

Week 2 (9 September)

Map Quiz
New Perspectives I: African Origins: Human Migration
(Guest lecture: Prof. Curtis Runnels)
New Perspectives II: Africa's Renaissance

Reading: Collins, *Problems in African History*, 1-52.
Shillington, *History of Africa*, 1-35.

Scales of History

Week 3 (16 September)

History on a Small Scale: The Ibo Social World
Sources II: BuHaya "Tree of Iron" Film and Discussion Questions

Reading: Shillington, 35-48
Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*.

Week 4 (23 September)

History on an Imperial Scale: Ethiopia, National Charter, and the Queen of Sheba
Taytu's Feast: Food and Power in Ethiopia's Political World, 1887

Reading: Connah, *African Civilizations*, 1-96.
Shillington, 62-77; 106-14.

Week 5 (30 September)

Oral Tradition: The Sundiata Epic/Social life of the king
Social life of the village: Wend Kunni (film) and discussion

Assignment: Prepare a question about the "unstated context" of Wend Kunni' setting and story

Reading: Niane, *Sundiata*.
Collins, 143-82.

State-Building in West Africa: Two Environments

Week 6 (7 October)

Kingdoms of the Sahel: Ghana and Mali
Askia Mohammed and Songhay/Decline of the Sahel

Reading:

Connah, *African Civilizations*, 97-149.
Shillington, pp. 77-105.
Collins, 109-41.

Week 7 (14 October is Monday schedule of classes)

Week 8 (21 October)

Africa's Islam I: Patterns (the Grand Scale)
Africa's Islam II: The Local Scale

Reading:

Shillington, 188-105.
Connah, 121-49.
Robinson, *Muslim Societies*, pp. 1-24.
Review for Mid-term/ Midterm Study Guide passed out

Week 9 (28 October)

Midterm Exam (Blue Book, 1 hour --in class)
Asante and the Golden Stool

Reading:

Robinson, 124-38.

Africa in the World Economy: The African Diaspora

Week 10 (4 November)

Gold in the Forest: Akan and the Forest States
Society and Economy in Ashanti

Reading:

Collins, 253-91.
Shillington, 179-94.

Week 11 (11 November)

The Atlantic System: Slavery, the Americas and African Society
The African Slave Trade: Slaves, Slavers, and the Voyage of the Diligent
Question for 3-4 page opinion paper will be distributed; due 11 November

Reading:

Robinson, 60-73.
Shillington, 169-78.
Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 1-71.

Week 12 (18 November)

Slavery in Africa: The Case of Asante (opinion paper due)
Film: Family across the Sea

Reading: Shillington, 224-39.
Connah, 150-82.
Thornton, 72-125.
Getz and Clarke, Abina

Assignment: Choose a document from Abina and explain how it helps us understand slavery debates described in the Thornton reading.

Week 13 (25 November)

The African Diaspora
Happy Thanksgiving
Reading: Thornton, 129-303.

Week 13 (2 December)

Peopling of South Africa: Layers of History
Early Society at the Cape

Reading: Shillington, 210-23.
Mofolo, *Chaka*

Week 14 (9 December)

Shaka Zulu and Zulu History
Moshewshwe: Another Side of Zulu Triumph
Africa and the World on the Eve of Colonialism
Final Exam Questions passed out.

Reading: Shillington, 256-72, 317-31.
Collins, 101-8.

Week 15 (10-16 December)

Final Exam: (Take Home format; questions passed out on final day of class; exams are due in my office at 12 noon on Monday December 16).