

**Boston University
Department of History
AA/HI 588
Women, Power and Culture in Africa
Wednesdays 3:00-6:00
Fall 2014
AA 101**

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Office Hours:
MF 11:00-12:00
and by appointment
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Course Description HI588 examines the changing status of women in Africa from the time of the Pharaohs to the contemporary period. The course begins with an introduction that lays out the major conceptual issues that scholars have wrestled with in an attempt to understand the place of women in African society through the ages. The first week's readings and discussions expose students to various definitions of gender/women, culture and power that will guide discussions throughout the semester. During the following eleven weeks (Weeks 2-12) of class, students read a range of biographies, articles and other writings by scholars that focus on some of Africa's outstanding female political leaders as well as groups of women whose life and actions shaped the history of Africa in fundamental ways. The intention here is explore the strategies women used to gain and exercise power, and to assess the extent to which their gender and their position as the guardians of culture in the different African societies informed how they achieved and held power. The readings in this section are divided into two parts. Weeks 2-5 deal with the Pharaonic period to the 1730's and highlight the variety of political positions that women held. The readings pay particular attention to the role that culture-particularly religion --played in women's ability to gain and exercise power. The next section of the course (weeks 6 and 7) covers the period from the 1730s to European conquest. The readings here interrogate the various strategies that free and enslaved women, wives, concubines and other groups of women adopted to empower themselves and their heirs. The readings also explore how women exploited their ties to powerful men or used other avenues-new economic opportunities, their control of traditions and rituals and the new political spaces open to them to become powerful players in their societies. The next part of the course (weeks 8-10) covers the period from European conquest to independence. The readings interrogate how African women contested new colonial gender categories that privileged males. The readings also examine how women exploited religious and other cultural spaces to join their male counterparts in the anti-colonial struggles which led to political independence. The last set of readings (weeks 11-12) follow the activities of women and girls as they asserted themselves and challenged the male dominated post-colonial African leadership.

During the last two weeks of the class students present their research papers to their colleagues.

The course follows both a conceptual and case specific formula. 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 and cultural leadership. These conceptual, biographical and analytical readings form the basis of the weekly lectures, presentations and discussions.

Some of the questions and issues that the readings address are: To what extent has western feminist scholarship and African feminist and womanist scholarship helped to advance the study of women in Africa? Is gender as a category of analysis important in the study of the history of women in Africa? Since few women exercise political power in Africa today, can the study of how women exercised political power in the past provide an analytical guide to assessing women's access to political power today? How has culture informed the ways in which women exercised power in the past and how has women's access to power and leadership change over the centuries? In what ways have non-African forces during the various historical periods affected women's access to power?¹

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> 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 [Boston University Academic Conduct Code](#)

Required Books (Available on Reserve at Mugar Library and Bookstore)

Stacy Schiff, *Cleopatra: A Life* (Little, Brown & Co. 2010).

John Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz and the Antonian Movement* (Cambridge, 1998).

Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work and Social Change* (Indiana, 2009).

Anna Marie du Preez Bezdrob, *Winnie Mandela: A Life* (Struik Publishers, 2005).

Grading

Three (3) critical essays	30% (see due dates below)
Oral Presentation, one page summaries and attendance	30%

Description of Assignments and Dates Due

Reaction Papers: Each student must write critical reaction essays on the readings for three different weeks. The first reaction essay should be based on the readings for week 2 (due at the beginning of Week 3's class). For the second reaction essay students should select one week's reading from weeks 3-7. For the third reaction paper students should select one week's reading from week 8-12. The reaction papers should be at least 4 (four) typed pages in length (double spaced, Times New Roman 12). The essays will be graded on the basis of critical evaluation of the main themes of the readings as well as for organization and coherence. The two critical essays based on readings for weeks 3-7 and 8-12 must be submitted at the end of class session when the readings are discussed. The three critical reaction essays will account for **30%** of the course grade.

Oral Presentation, Class Participation and 1 page summaries: Each student will be required to make one formal presentation (at least 30 minutes long) on one of the weekly readings (weeks 3-12). Students should not select for their oral presentations the same weeks' readings that they have selected for their reaction papers. Students who are neither making presentations nor writing reaction papers for a particular week are expected to submit at the end of the discussion a one page typed summary of the week's reading. All students are expected to attend each class session and actively participate in class discussions. The formal presentation, one page responses to the readings, attendance and class participation will account for **30%** 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). Each student will make a formal 12-15 minute oral presentation of his/her research paper during weeks 13 and 14. Completed research papers are due Friday December 12. The research paper should be between 4,500-5,000 words (undergraduates), or 8,000-9,000 words (graduate students). Research papers from students who have not consulted with me will not be accepted. The oral presentation and final research paper account for **40%** of the course grade.

Weekly Readings**Part One:****Women and Status in Africa: Exploring the Roots****Week 1 (9/3): Contesting Theories and Approaches****Readings:**

Jean Boydston, "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis." (BL)
Oyéwùmì, "Conceptualizing Gender," p. 1-5.(BL)

Makinde, "Motherhood as a source of Empowerment." (BL)
Herbert, *Iron, Gender and Power*, pp. 219-238 (BL).
Introduction, Lecture, Discussion

Part 11 Women, Power and Culture: Late Antiquity to 1730s I

Week 2 (9/10) Locating the Origins: Dynastic Egypt and the Nile Valley

Readings:

Lohwasser, "Queenship in Kush" (BL)
Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, "Nubian Queens in the Nile Valley and Afro-Asiatic Cultural History" (BL).
Blackman, "Position of Women Ancient Egypt" (BL)
Reaction Paper (due 9/17)
Lecture and Discussion

Women, Power and Culture: Late Antiquity to 1730s II

Week 3 (9/17) Cleopatra: Astute Politician, Temptress, or Maligned Woman

Readings

Schiff, *Cleopatra: A Life*
Witt, "Isis as Perceived by Women" (BL).
Johnson, "A Quæen, A Great Queen: Cleopatra and the Politics..." (BL)
Student Presentation, Lecture, Discussion

Week 4 (9/24) The Paradox of Queen Njinga

Readings:

Miller, "Nzinga of Matamba in a New Perspective" (BL)
Thornton, "Ideology and Power in Central Africa: The Case of Queen Njinga (1624-1663)" (BL)
Heywood, *Njinga: A Biography* (Two Chapters from Ms. Njinga Bio-Typescript available).
Student Presentation, Lecture, Discussion

Week 5 (10/1) Visionaries and Politicians in the Kingdoms of Benin, Kongo and Ethiopia

ReadingsL

Iyoba Idia, "The Hidden Oba of Benin," *Jenda* 9, (2006): 1-21 (BL)
Thornton, *Dona Beatrice*.
Belcher, "Sisters Debating the Jesuits," (BL)
Student Presentations, Lecture, Discussion
Guest-Prof. John Thornton

Part 11 Women, Power and Culture, 1730s to European Conquest

Week 6 (10/8) African Women: Trans-cultural Relations and New Bases of Power

Readings:

Hilary Jones, "From Marriage a la Mode," (BL)
E. Francis White, "Creole Women Traders in the Nineteenth Century," (BL)
Claire Bosc-Tiesse, "How Beautify She is in Her Mirror..." (BL)
Adu-Boahen, Kwabena, "Abolition, Economic Transition, Gender and Slavery"
(BL)
Student Presentations, Lecture, Discussion

Week 7 (10/15) Queen Mothers, Warriors, Traders, Concubines

Readings

McIntosh, *Yoruba Women* (begin to p. 56, 79-94;)
Kaplan, *Queen Mothers* (BL)
Lovejoy, "Concubinage in the Sokoto Caliphate (1804-1903)," BL
Nast, *Concubines and Power*, intro. (BL)
Law, "Amazons of Dahomey," (BL)

Lecture 3:00-3:20 African Studies Library 3:00-3:20

**Student Presentations, Lecture, Discussion 3:30 African American Studies
Rm. 101**

Part IV African Women and the Colonial Regimes

Week 8 (10/22) Changing Notions of Status, Gender and Power

Readings:

McIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, 79-94; 109-146.
Lovejoy, "Concubinage...Early Colonial Northern Nigeria" (BL)
Thomas, "Imperial Concerns and Women's Affairs," (BL)

Student Presentations, Lecture, Discussion

Week 9 (10/29) African Women in the Colonial Economy

Readings:

McIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, pp. 151-185.
Pierce, "Farmers and 'Prostitutes'...Kano Emirate, Nigeria," (BL)
Adirento, "Gender, Race Class, Prostitution...Lagos." (BL)

Student Presentations, Lecture, Discussion

Week 10 (11/ 5)

Readings:

African Women, Health, Religion and Empowerment
MaIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, 189-215.
White, "They Could Make Their Victims Dull" (BL)
Akyeampong and Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, Power" (BL)
Parker, "Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft..." (BL)
Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change" (BL).

Student Presentations, Lecture, Discussion

Part V African Women and African Nationalism

Week 11 (11/12) African Women and Decolonization

Readings:

McIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, 216-246
West, "Girls with Guns...Frelimo" (BL)
Preez Bezdrob, *Winnie Mandela: A Life* (begin to 136)
Guest-Iyabo Obasanjo (Former Senator, Nigeria)

Student Presentations, Lecture, Discussion

Week 12 (11/19) African Women and the Wars of Liberation

Preez Bezdrob, *Winnie Mandela: A Life* (p. 136 to end)
Kesby, "Arenas for Control, Terrains of Gender Contestation...
Zimbabwe 1972-1980." (BL)
Flame (Movie on Zimbabwean Women and Liberation (View at Krasker
Media Library-Mugar Library before Class)

Student Presentations, Lecture, Discussion

Week 13 (12/3) Final Paper Presentations, Discussion

Week 14 (12/10) Final Paper Presentations, Discussion

December 12 Final Papers Due by 5:00 pm.

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