Women, Power and Culture in Africa
Wednesdays 3:00-6:00
Fall 2014
AA 101

Prof. Linda Heywood
African American Studies
138 Mountfort St. Room 202
Email: heywood@bu.edu

Office Hours:
Office Hours:  
MF 11:00-12:00 and by appointment
Telephone: 617 358 3389

Course Description H1588 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 to 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?

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

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 1 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)
- 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 Quaen, 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)

**Student Presentation, Lecture, Discussion**

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

**Readings**
- Thornton, *Dona Beatrice*.
- Belcher, “Sisters Debating the Jesuits,” (BL)

**Student Presentations, Lecture, Discussion**

**Guest-Prof. John Thornton**

**Part III 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
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)
- 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.

---

1 The syllabus, course descriptions, and handouts created by Professor Heywood, and all class lectures, are copyrighted by Boston University and/or Professor Heywood. Except with respect to enrolled students as set forth below, the materials and lectures may not be reproduced in any form or otherwise copied, displayed or distributed, nor should works derived from them be reproduced, copied, displayed or distributed without the written permission of Professor Heywood. Infringement of the copyright in these materials, including any sale or commercial use of notes, summaries, outlines or other reproductions of lectures, constitutes a violation of the copyright laws and is prohibited. Students enrolled in the course are allowed to share with other enrolled students course materials, notes, and other writings based on the course materials and lectures, but may not do so on a commercial basis or otherwise for payment of any kind. Please note in particular that selling or buying class notes, lecture notes or summaries, or similar materials both violates copyright and interferes with the academic mission of the College, and is therefore prohibited in this class and will be considered a violation of the student code of responsibility that is subject to academic sanctions.