

**CIVILIZATIONS OF AFRICA (SIS 250 – 001)**  
**American University, School of International Service**

Spring 2009  
Thursdays, 11:20 – 2:00 in Kogod T59  
TA: Josh Kaplan  
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Office hrs: Tues 3-6/Thur 2-4

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course provides a brief introduction to Africa’s people, societies, and cultures. Many of the readings are historical in nature. We will begin by exploring some of the earliest evidence of humanity and the achievements of the first civilizations. Other readings draw upon political science, anthropology, and other disciplines. This will require us to integrate knowledge from a variety of sources and voices. Lectures often highlight some of the empirical challenges presented by the material, while classroom discussion frequently stimulates ethical debates.

Our learning goals for the course include: (1) identifying variation among and the accomplishments of important African civilizations; (2) analyzing the broad developmental effects of demography and geography on technological innovation, political survival, and social change; (3) exploring the adaptation and diffusion of knowledge; and (4) discussing the complex interactions between indigenous traditions and external influences such as European imperialism.

The course also incorporates a unique collaboration with students enrolled in “African Civilizations” at the American University of Nigeria (AUN). Only one assignment requires you to engage in online dialogue with the students through our blog. But you are encouraged to help construct a “classroom without walls” by posting other messages. The blog is located at: <http://africancivilizations-spring2009>. Contact the TA if you have technical problems.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

***Sundiata* essay** – approximately three pages long (10 % of grade). Due on February 5.

***Things Fall Apart* essay** – approximately three pages long (10% of grade). Due on March 19.

**Message postings** – You are required to post three specific messages during the course. Please remember to sign with a name that the instructor can clearly identify.

- **Final paper topic** – Briefly describe your topic in the designated Blackboard discussion forum. If you are doing the service learning option, post a link to your personal blog.
- **Interpretive essay** – Write a short online essay that draws upon course materials in order to interpret one of the African myths of origin. Please note that the readings are posted on Blackboard but you should post your assignment on the course blog (10% of grade). Due on February 16.
- **Slavery** – Actively and thoughtfully participate in the Blackboard discussion about slavery. You must post by Monday, February 23. (10% of course grade.)

**Final project** – is due on April 16 (25% of grade). You have two very different options:

**Research paper option:** Write a short research paper on an African civilization of your choice. If you choose to write about a broad theme it should be approved in advance by the professor. An annotated bibliography is due on February 26. Your final paper grade will incorporate this assignment so please remember to attach it to the final paper.

**Community-based learning:** Volunteer or intern with an organization working on Africa. Create a blog that serves as a journal. AU's Community Service Center (CSC) can help you identify an appropriate organization. You may also want to look at the NGOs on my Facebook profile. Additional information is posted on Blackboard under course documents. The first part of your journal is due on February 26.

**Class participation** – 10%. This will incorporate online posting but you are still expected to participate in class.

**Final Exam** – in class on April 30 at 11:20 (25% of your grade).

**Required Readings:** Required readings are indicated below. Readings posted on Blackboard have an \*asterisk. The following required books are available at the campus bookstore:

- Collins, Robert and James Burns. 2007. *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Niane, D.T. 2006. *Sundiata* (Revised Edition). Essex: Longman.
- Hari, Daoud. 2008. *The Translator: A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur*. Random House.
- Achebe, Chinua. 1959. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books (1995 edition).
- Laitin, David. 1992. *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Recommended books on reserve in the library:**

- Iliffe, John. 2007. *Africans: The History of a Continent*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. (second edition)
- Davidson, Basil. 1991. *Africa in History* (Revised and Expanded Edition). New York: Simon and Schuster.

**(1) Course Overview** (January 15)

**The Peopling of a Continent**

Collins and Burns, Chapter 1, "The Historical Geography of Africa"

\* Iliffe, John. Chapter 2, "The Emergence of Food Producing Communities," in *Africans*.

Recommended:

\* Wilford, John. "Kenya Fossils Challenge Linear Evolution of Homo Sapiens," *New York Times*, August 9, 2007.

**(2) Agriculture and Iron** (January 22)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 3, "The Peoples of sub-Saharan Africa," and Chapter 4, "Crops, Cows, and Iron"

Recommended:

Davidson, Chapter 3, "The Factors of Growth," (pages 61 – 87)  
Iliffe, Chapter 6, "Colonising Society in Eastern and Southern Africa"

**Aksum and the New Faiths**

Collins and Burns, Chapter 5, "Northeast Africa in the Age of Aksum"

Recommended:

Iliffe, Chapter 4, "Christianity and Islam"

**(3) Mali, Songhai, Ghana** (January 29)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 6, "Empires of the Plains"

Read *Sundiata*

**(4) East Africa and the Great Lakes** (February 5)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 7 "East Africa," and Chapter 8, "The Lake Plateau" (skim 122 – 127)

VIDEO in class: *Africa: A History Denied* by Time Life (VHS 5178)

→ *Sundiata* paper due

**(5) Early West African Empires** (February 12)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 9, "Societies and States of the West African Forest"

**Southern Africa and the Tropical Kingdoms of Central Africa**

Collins and Burns, Chapter 10, "Kingdoms and Trade in Central Africa," and Chapter 11, "People and States of Southern Africa"

Recommended:

\* Nziem, Ndaywel, "The Political System of the Luba and the Lunda," in *General History of Africa, Volume V: Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, edited by B.A. Ogot. UNESCO and Heinemann, 1992.

\* Usuanlele, Uyilawam. 2005. "Precolonial Benin: A Political Economy Perspective," in *Precolonial Nigeria*, edited by Ogundiran. Trenton: Africa World Press.

**Read the "myths of origin" from one of the African civilizations posted on Blackboard.**

→ Myths assignment due on the course blog, Monday, February 16

**(6) Slavery in Africa** (February 19)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 12, "The Arrival of Europeans" and Chapter 14, "Slavery in Africa"

VIDEO in class: *Wonders of the African World* (DVD 3698)

**East Coast and West Coast Trade**

Chapter 15, "Atlantic Slave Trade," and Chapter 16, "Asian Slave Trade"

**The Consequences of Slavery**

"The Legacy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade" hearing by Constitution Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee, available at <http://judiciary.house.gov/oversight.aspx?ID=400>.

Read the testimony by Charles Ogletree and Thomas Wells.

→ Slavery posting on Blackboard due on Monday, February 23

**(7) Portuguese Decline and the birth of South Africa** (February 26)

Collins and Burns, Chapter 19, “Africans, Dutch, and the British in South Africa”

**The Colonial Era and the Scramble**

Collins and Burns, Chapter 18 “European Conquest,” and Chapter 20, “European Colonial Rule”

Recommended:

Davidson, “Conquest and Colonial Rule” (pages 275 – 307)

Iliffe, Chapter 9, “Colonial Invasion” and Chapter 10, “Colonial Change, 1918 – 1950”

→ Annotated bibliography for paper option 1 due. Draft diary for paper option 2 due.

**(8) Igbo Society** (March 5)

Achebe, Chapters 1 – 5

Recommended:

\* Uchendu, Victor. 1965. Chapter 5, “Founding a New Family,” in *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*. Holt, Rinehart.

**Falling Apart**

Achebe, Chapters 6 – 13

Yeats, W. B. “The Second Coming.” Available at: <http://www.online-literature.com/yeats/780/>

**(9) Meeting the Missionaries** (March 19)

Achebe, Chapters 14 – end

Recommended:

Collins and Burns, Chapter 17, “Prelude to the European Conquest of Africa”

\* Harneit-Sievers, Axel. 2006. Chapter 4, “Town People and Church People: The Impact of Christianity”

→ *Things Fall Apart* essay due

**(10) Politics and Culture in Darfur** (March 26)

Read Hari. Be sure to read the primer at the end of the book.

**(11) Africa in Transition** (April 2)

\* Guide to the Video: *Yoruba Hometowns and Local Development in Nigeria*, by Lillian Trager.

\* Pamela Constable, “Area Immigrants with Wounds that Won’t Heal,” *Washington Post*, November 3, 2008.

Karin Brulliard, “Zulus Eagerly Defy Ban on Virginity Test,” *Washington Post*, September 26, 2008.

Other materials to be posted on Blackboard.

**(12) Language Repertoires and Politics** (April 9)

Laitin, Chapters 1 and 2

## **Understanding Language Outcomes**

Laitin, Chapters 4 and 5.

### **(13) Language and State Construction** (April 16)

Read Laitin, Chapter 6. Skim Chapter 7.

**GUEST SPEAKER:** Joseph Ole Tipanko, Maasai Good Salvage Outreach Organization, Kenya  
Readings to be posted on Blackboard.

→ **Final paper due.**

### **(14) Course conclusion** (April 23)

\* Stephanie McCrummen, "Lured Toward Modern Life, Pygmy Families Left in Limbo,"  
*Washington Post*, Nov. 12, 2006, p. A12

\* Sharon LaFraniere, "Cell Phones Catapult Rural Africa to 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *New York Times*,  
August 25, 2005, p. 1.

Pamela Constable, "United by Country, Divided by Their Tribal Differences," *Washington Post*,  
September 29, p. B4.

**Service learning project presentations.**

**FINAL EXAM, ON APRIL 30 FROM 11:20 – 1:50**