

## AFRICA IN LITERATURE AND FILM

Fall 2019

Instructor: Dr. Edmondson

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Office Hours: Mondays 1 – 2:20 pm or by appointment

Class Time: M 2:30-3:50 pm, W 1-2:20 pm

### Course Description

Africa as dystopian nightmare. Africa as utopian fantasy. Neither depiction bears much resemblance to the extraordinarily varied cultures of the continent, itself. So what do these widely—and wildly—different images tell us about the meaning of Africa to the West, both historically and in our contemporary moment?

This course will explore representations of Africa and Africans from both African and non-African perspectives. Utilizing a variety of narratives, we will investigate why Africa remains a fraught symbol of racial, political and gendered relationships in Western discourses. Course material will include film, poetry, novels, and critical essays. Topics for discussion will include race and coloniality; depictions of African nationalism and its gender/sexual politics.

Fiction: *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad (Poland/U.K.); *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Derek Walcott (St. Lucia); “The Start of the Affair”, Nuruddin Farah (Somalia), “The Arrangers of Marriage”, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie (Nigeria), *Tarzan* (U.K.)

Poetry: “Back to Africa?”, Louise Bennett (Jamaica); “A Far Cry From Africa”, Derek Walcott (St. Lucia); “Heritage” Countee Cullen (USA), “The White Man’s Burden”, Rudyard Kipling (UK).

Films: *The Last Supper*, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Cuba, 1976); *Sugar Cane Alley*, Euzhan Palcy (1987); *Camp de Thiaroye*, Ousmane Sembene (Senegal, 1988); *Coming to America* (USA, 1988); *Tarzan* (USA, 2016); *Black Panther* (USA, 2018).

Essays: “Can You Make a Non-Racist Tarzan Movie?” (Rebecca Keegan, *Los Angeles Times*); “The African Character” (from *Philosophy of History*), G.W.F. Hegel; “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*”, Chinua Achebe; “How to Write About Africa”, Wainaina Binyavanga; “The Case for Contamination”, Kwame Anthony Appiah; “Leopold Senghor Dies at 95: Senegal’s Poet of Négritude” (Albin Krebs, *New York Times*).

### Course Requirements (non-HLLC students)

- 1) You shall be required to take five in-class examinations and write one take-home essay. Exams One and Two combined will comprise your midterm examination. Exams Three and Four combined will cover the rest of the course up to that point. Both the Final Essay and Final Exam will cover the remainder of the course materials, with perhaps one or two questions on the Final Exam on earlier material.
- 2) There are two exam formats: one will consist of roughly five or six questions requiring detailed and concise answers on a specific reading, poem or film; the other is an in-class essay. For the in-class essay you may bring to class direct quotations that you intend to use in your essay, but no notes otherwise. You *must* hand in your quotation notes with your essay. The questions will usually involve comparative analysis of two or more items. Your responses must be in full sentences and grammatically correct; points will be taken off for poor grammar. In the case of exceptionally poor grammar, you will receive no points at all. The take-home essay will be about 900-1200 words in length, double-spaced, MLA format, no use of secondary sources allowed.
- 3) Students shall give an oral presentation to the class on some aspect of the course materials, some of which may require outside research. The presentation *must* be written beforehand and uploaded to Turnitin prior to presentation. (A sign-up sheet will be available the first and second days of class.)
- 4) Proper note-taking is a critical component in writing a good exam; therefore, we will periodically review our notes for the course and discuss ways in which to take better notes. Students will be asked at various points during the class to read out their notes on a preceding lecture. If you are absent for a class, you are still responsible for the notes on that class. Remember: The purpose of note-taking is not merely so that you can recall information, but, more importantly, so that you can recall key points of analysis on that information. Therefore, your notes may record not only my ideas, but also the conflicting opinions within the class on that subject. Typically I reserve the last five minutes of class time for note-taking.
- 5) Generally I offer a couple of essay-format extra credit options throughout the semester. If you wish to take advantage of the extra credit essay option you must notify me in advance. I post the essay questions on Blackboard; you must upload your essay to Turnitin, the anti-plagiarism detection software.

### Course Requirements: HLLC students

- 1) You will take Exams One and Three (non-essay exams) as well as the Final Exam. Exams One and Three will comprise 25% of your final grade; the Final Exam will comprise another 25%.
- 2) You will give an oral presentation that must also be submitted in writing beforehand, per presentation requirements above.
- 3) You will write a final essay, roughly 2500-3000 words (or 10 pages) in length. Your essay will be on a relevant topic of your own choosing (with prior approval by me), and must focus on at least two course texts, utilizing at least two **appropriate** secondary sources beyond those on the course syllabus. Your final essay comprises

- 50% of your final grade.
- 4) You will submit both an outline and a draft of your final essay, including secondary sources, before you hand it in (see schedule below).
  - 5) As an HLLC you must meet with me individually at least once during the semester.
  - 6) You will meet with a librarian at Dana during the semester to learn how to identify relevant secondary sources.

### Grading Rubric and Policy

I use an alternate grading system so that I have more latitude in issuing grades. Under this system, exams are marked on a scale of 100 points: under 40 is a Fail. 40-49 is a D. 50-59 is a C. 60 – 63 is a C+. 64 - 74 is a B. 75 to 79 is a B+. 80 and over is A. While on your exams and papers I will note whether a paper is an A+ (90 and above), or that your paper is in the B-/C+ territory, the grade that will be recorded is the one that corresponds to the actual percentage grade (for example, a 64 may be a B-, but on your final grade score I will record it as a B, etc.)

Midterm Exam (Exam One and Two combined): 30 percent of total grade

Exam Three: 20 percent of total grade

Exam Four (essay): 15 percent of total grade

Final Exam: 35 percent of total grade

Participation: Superior rating—3 points to final average. Average rating—no points.

Presentation: Superior rating—3 points to final average. Average rating—no points.

PLEASE NOTE: you may receive extra points for a superior presentation OR for superior participation, but not for both.

All exams and papers are evaluated in three key areas: content, grammar, and logic. Content is the most important of the three areas (a student may fail an exam or paper for lack of content, for example, even with good grammar and logic) but one cannot attain a grade of C or higher without at least marginally competent grammar and logic.

To attain a grade of A an exam/quiz/essay must attain a superior rating in all three areas. In other words, it must rank as excellent on all three counts, free of grammatical mistakes, with a seamless logical flow from one idea to the next, and with some original interpretation.

B+ is given for an above-average analysis which shows some level of excellence in content and logic with very good or excellent grammar, but has some minor flaws in grammar and logic.

A grade of B is achieved by above average analysis in content with competent grammar and logic.

A grade of C+ is achieved if the analysis is better than average—more than half of what should be there—but with less than competent use of grammar and logic.

A grade of C is achieved if the analysis is middling—roughly half of what should be there—with less than competent use of grammar and logic.

A grade of D represents subpar content—if less than half of the necessary content is present. It may also represent excessively poor use of grammar and logic, to the point of near-incomprehension.

A grade of F is given if there is no content or almost none. An F is also achieved by extremely poor grammar—to the point of incomprehensibility—and lack of logic. Finally, an F can be given for a late or missed paper or missed exam.

### Electronics Policy

Electronic media is a welcome tool to aid learning in the modern classroom. However, used irresponsibly it can also be detrimental to learning when students lose the ability to focus on lectures or distract other students with it. Use of electronic media is therefore a student privilege, not a right, and may be revoked by the instructor under certain conditions. During class time certain electronic media—laptop computers and tablets, not cell phones—may be used only for the following purposes:

- 1) to read required course texts (E-books or texts posted on Blackboard)
- 2) to type notes on lectures and classroom discussions
- 3) for all in-class exams, provided the student has first downloaded Respondus

Electronic media may NOT be used to browse the internet, answer email, check social media, or for any use that is not directly related to the course. If any student is found to be in violation of the electronics policy—as witnessed by the instructor, the graduate assistant, or as reported by fellow classmates—that student will be banned from using any electronic media for the remainder of the course. If the student continues to use electronic media despite the ban, his or her final grade will be reduced a full letter grade at the conclusion. In extreme cases I reserve the right to ban the student from the classroom altogether. The student will be notified in writing if s/he has lost the privilege of using electronic media. Cell phones must be turned off during class time or set to “vibrate”.

### Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, for which a student may receive a range of punishments, including failing the course, a permanent record on his or her final transcript, suspension or even expulsion from the University. Please familiarize yourself with the University’s definition of plagiarism by reviewing the Rutgers University Policy on Academic Integrity, here: <http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/plagiarism>.

Some plagiarism is unintentional. Therefore, for the purposes of this class no secondary sources should be used, either through direction quotation or substantial paraphrase, in any student presentation, exam or essay without prior permission of the instructor. If you have been given permission to use secondary sources in your submitted work, please follow the appropriate methods of attribution.

If I suspect any student of plagiarism I will bring it to his/her attention and report it to the administration. We faculty have a professional obligation to report all instances of plagiarism in our classes. Failure to do so promotes inequity among the student body, given that honest students have not had the advantage of using external sources in preparing their work.

Please read the attached Academic Integrity Policy, and sign and return the attached Rutgers Integrity Pledge.

### Disability Services and Accommodations

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. For more information please contact Kate Torres at [\(973\)353-5375](tel:9733535375) or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting [odsnewark@rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu).

All books are available at University Bookstore in Bradley Hall. Most films are available in Dana Library's Audiovisual Center on DVD for viewing. All other readings or films will either be on Blackboard or linked directly to the syllabus below.

A list of key terms is listed below.

Imperialism  
The Dark Continent  
Colonialism  
Diaspora  
Back-to-Africa Movement  
Racialism  
Négritude  
Afrocubanismo  
Afrocentrism  
Hybridity  
Black Nationalism

### Course Materials

9/4: Introduction. Sign up for presentations.

### Formative Images of Africa in the West

9/9: “How to Write About Africa”

9/11: “The African Character”. Key words: The Dark Continent, Racialism

9/16: Discussion of *Tarzan* (view online/library before class), “Can You Make a Non-Racist Tarzan Movie?” <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-tarzan-colonial-stories-feature-20160621-snap-story.html> Key word: Imperialism

9/18: *Heart of Darkness* Key word: Colonialism

9/23: *Heart of Darkness*

9/25: *Heart of Darkness*

9/30: “An Image of Africa”, “The White Man’s Burden”

10/2: catch-up, review

10/7: review

10/9: **MIDTERM EXAM ONE. ESSAY TOPICS DISTRIBUTED**

10/14: **MIDTERM EXAM TWO; IN-CLASS ESSAY. HAND IN ESSAY NOTES. (HLLC STUDENTS MEET IN DANA LIBRARY WITH LIBRARIAN NATALIE BORISOVETS)**

### African Legacies in the Diaspora

10/16: “Heritage”, “Back to Africa?”, “A Far Cry From Africa” key terms: diaspora, Back-to-Africa movement.

10/21: Discussion of *Sugar Cane Alley* (view online/library before class).

10/23: Discussion of *Camp de Thiaroye* (view online/library). Read “Leopold Senghor Dies at 95” <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/21/world/leopold-senghor-dies-at-95-senegal-s-poet-of-negritude.html>. Key word: Négritude

10/23: Discussion of *Camp de Thiaroye* cont’d.

10/28: Discussion of *The Last Supper* (view online/library before class)

10/30: Discussion of *The Last Supper* cont'd. Key word: Afrocubanismo

11/4: *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Act One. Key terms: Black Nationalism, Afrocentrism

11/11: *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Act Two

11/13: review

**11/18: EXAM THREE. EXAM FOUR TAKE-HOME ESSAY TOPIC(S) DISTRIBUTED**

Fantasies of Africa

11/20 *Coming to America* (Watch online/library before class)

11/22: “The Arrangers of Marriage”

11/25: “The Start of the Affair” (**HLLC STUDENTS SUBMIT FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL**)

11/27: THANKSGIVING. NO CLASS.

12/2: “The Case for Contamination” Key word: hybridity **UPLOAD EXAM FOUR ESSAY TO TURNITIN BY CLASS TIME.**

12/4: catch-up/review (**HLLC PAPER OUTLINES DUE AT CLASS TIME**)

12/9: catch-up/review. (**HLLC PAPER DRAFTS, INCLUDING SOURCES, DUE AT CLASS TIME**)

12/11: catch up/review (**HLLC FINAL PAPERS DUE AT CLASS TIME**)

12/23: **FINAL EXAM IN CLASS, 3 – 6 pm**

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