

PEOPLES AND CULTURES OF AFRICA

Spring 2013

TH 2:30-5:20pm

Boyden 413

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Office Hours: M 10:30 am-12:00pm, and by appointment

Course Description

The continent of Africa south of the Sahara desert remains on the fringe of the global political economy, and Westerners tend to blame Africans for many of the devastating problems they face today, such as poverty, corruption, AIDS, ethnic violence, famine, and environmental decline. Despite Africa's importance in the history of the United States and Europe, the American public in particular lacks knowledge and curiosity about Africa. Many think of Africa as a "country," a country beyond hope. This course will challenge Western ideas of Africa by exploring its cultural diversity and history from the era of African empires to the present day. Through films, reportage of current events, and ethnographic studies, we will learn how African peoples and lands have not only made the comforts of "the West" possible but have also contributed to our knowledge of human society and culture in general.

Through weekly lectures, reading, films, discussions, and independent research, students will learn and demonstrate a grasp of contemporary African issues in historical perspective. We will gain greater awareness of the ways Africa gets depicted in the US and European media. Through case studies of African societies, we will also gain a comparative view of how humans forge culture, such as how they organize their familial relationships, make a living, define masculinity and femininity, imagine the causes and cures of disease, conceive of spirit, interpret social and economic change, confront cultural difference, and respond to violence.

Textbooks:

You are required to purchase the two books listed below.

- 1) Ashforth, Adam. 2005. *Madumo, A Man Bewitched*. University of Chicago.
- 2) Keim, Curtis. 2009. *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*. Westview Press, second edition.

Objectives

- 1) Students will gain geographical and historical knowledge of Sub-Saharan Africa beginning with an overview of the early African kingdoms and empires of the Sahel, through the 19th century colonial period, and into the era of “development” that continues into the present day.
- 2) Students will be able to analyze how the African continent has been socially constructed in Europe and the US, and they will be able to critique these portrayal through historical analysis and ethnographic data.
- 3) Students will gain an understanding of the cultural diversity of Sub-Saharan Africa within contemporary national boundaries and across the continent.
- 4) Students will demonstrate familiarity with many of the key challenges that face African societies, including environmental degradation, labor exploitation, acute poverty, infectious disease, warfare, and political instability.
- 5) Students will gain knowledge of Africa’s contributions to Western cosmopolitanism, including the influence of African arts and music, and African labor and natural resources.

Course Requirements

The weekly assignments will be posted on Blackboard. You must check BB regularly since assignments on the hard copy syllabus are subject to change. This course will test students on material presented in lectures, films, weekly readings, and class discussions. You are expected to read the weekly assignments carefully and on to come to class with prepared to discuss readings. ***If preparation by the majority of the class turns out to be less than desired, weekly reading questions and typed out answers will be assigned.***

Grading

The course grade will be based on participation in class; a take-home essay quiz on *Madumo*; a group oral presentation on a specific theme (environmental conservation, mining, slavery, trade, for example) where each student in the group will present a specific case study on that theme; and a final exam.

class participation: 10%

Quiz: 15%

Thematic group presentation: 15%

take home exam questions on *Madumo*: 25%

final exam: 35%

POLICIES:

PLAGARISM and INDEPENDENT WORK: Missed exams, quizzes, or assignment require either that a student arranges a makeup date in advance with one of the professors, or that the student provides legitimate documentation for an illness or other emergency.

Students should re-read the university policies on Academic Integrity. Cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism (submitting someone else's written, fully or partially, as one's own) will not be tolerated, and this includes using or adapting someone else's work for a take-home exam or for course notes. It may result in a failing grade for the course. Here are some general rules of thumb on plagiarism: If you are unsure whether you are plagiarizing text, take precautions by always referencing the materials you have read. In other words, you must add a footnote, endnote, or cite your source text in parenthesis. Citations show you have done serious research and have acknowledged the work of other scholars. However, it is not good to rely on one or two sources exclusively. Your research papers must include multiple sources of information (these sources may be in the form of books, journal and newspaper articles, magazines, internet resources, films, etc.).

Forms of plagiarism include the following scenarios:

- You find a research paper in the library or off the internet and submit it as your own paper.
- You pay a service or individual to write your paper for you submit it as your own work.
- You use a portion of an article, radio or TV show, book, internet paper, etcetera, without giving a citation for the work and therefore implying the text is your own.
- You find an article or research paper and paraphrase its argument or ideas in your own words without offering a citation, and then you submit ideas as your own.

ATTENDANCE: Regular attendance is required and I do roll call. If you arrive after roll call, you will be marked absent; also, leaving class early will be counted as an absence. Unexcused absences will affect your course grade. **After the third unexcused absence, the final grade will be docked no matter how well you did on other assignments and tests.**

For the fourth unexcused absence, you will be unable to get higher than a B+ in the course, all other work figured in. For the fifth unexcused absence, you will be unable to get higher than a B; for the sixth, no higher than a C+, and so on according to the grades that Rutgers-Newark recognizes (C, D, F).

POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS: Powerpoint presentations used in class lectures will be made available to you one week before scheduled exams and not necessarily before that, so it is essential that you take notes and keep up with the readings.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Students' use of laptops, internet, and cell phone texting are **NOT ALLOWED** in class. For exams, films and quizzes, you must put your phones under your desks. It is expected that you will take notes on the lectures, and that you will do this by hand.

FILMS:

Secrets of the Dead: Slave Ship Mutiny:

Taking viewers back to a time in which the slave trade was still alive and well, this inspiring "Secrets of the Dead" special recounts a group of African slaves' heroic struggle for freedom as they overtook their Dutch captors in a unified mutiny. Although the slaves demanded that the crew steer the slave ship *Meermin* back to Madagascar, the vessel wrecked on a beach east of Cape Town, South Africa, before it could reach its new destination.

King Leopold's Ghost (2006): Belgium's King Leopold II is best known as chief ruler of the Congo Free State, a project relying on African slaves to extract rubber and ivory and export them back to Europe and line Leopold's pocket. Academy Award nominee Don Cheadle narrates this screen adaptation of Adam Hochschild's best-selling book. Filmmakers Pippa Scott and Oreet Rees offer a view into the depth of the brutal leader's reign and its impact on modern-day politics.'

Good Fortune (2010). Western nations annually spend millions in dollars in relief efforts in African nations, but the problems of poverty and famine refuse to go away. Is this because of a fundamental problem with Africa, or due to a chronic misunderstanding of the matters at hand by Western politicians and businessmen? (instant video, 1h25).

Mugabe and the White African (2009): An unprecedented look inside politically fractured Zimbabwe under dictator Robert Mugabe, this documentary follows Michael Campbell, one of the country's few remaining white farmers, as he bravely battles to protect his land from government seizure.

Witches in Exile (2005). Belief in witchcraft continues to terrorize women. This film introduces us to five women who have taken refuge in the Kukuo witches' camp and who represent a cross section of the 'witch' population of Northern Ghana today. (78 mins)

ASSIGNMENTS (Subject to change. Rely on Blackboard postings first and foremost!)

WEEK 1 -- Introduction

WEEK 2 -- "The Idea of Africa" / READ: Mistaking Africa, Chapters 1,2,3

WEEK 3-- "Early African Empires"/READ: Mistaking Africa, Chaps 4,5,6

WEEK 4-- "The Swahili Coast"/READ: Mistaking Africa, Chaps 7,8,9

WEEK 5-- "Slavery"/READ: Mistaking Africa, Chaps 10,11,12; Film: *Secrets of the Dead*.

WEEK 6-- **QUIZ** on Mistaking Africa, film, lectures; "The Scramble for Africa"

WEEK 7--GROUP ORAL PRESENTATIONS (essays of group members due following week); Film: *King Leopold's Ghost*.

WEEK 8—GROUP ORAL PRESENTATIONS (essays of group members due following week).
WEEK 9-- **SPRING BREAK** (Read Madumo, Chaps 1,2,3,4,5
WEEK 10—GROUP ORAL PRESENTATIONS (essays of group members due following week); “The Rise of Development;” READ: Madumo, Chaps 6,7,8,9
WEEK 11— “Environmental Conflicts;” Film: *Good Fortune*; READ: Madumo, 10,11,12, 13
WEEK 12— “Legacy of Apartheid;” READ: Madumo, 14,15,16,17
WEEK 13— READ: Madumo, 18,19,20; Film: *Witches in Exile*.
WEEK 14— **Madumo take-home exam essays due.**
WEEK 15—Wrap-up and review

GROUP PRESENTATION THEMES:

Environmental/species conservation
Mining
Spirit Possession
Musical traditions
Tourism (eco-tourism, sex tourism, cultural tourism...)
Race
Child soldiers
Human-Animal relations and encounters
Missions and missionaries