

INSTRUCTOR: SAID S. SAMATAR

Sample Syllabus

COURSE TITLE: 510-263: PRECOLONIAL AFRICA: A SURVEY

Office: 329 Conklin

Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-2:30pm and by appointment. This being a double-period course, classes are held once a week, Tuesdays, 2:30-5:20pm

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REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Kevin Shillington. *History of Africa* (St. Martin's Press), at New Jersey Books, Bleeker St. or through Amazon, which is usually cheaper
2. Basil Davidson. *Africa in History: Themes and Outlines*, Amazon.Com
3. D. Niane. *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*. Amazon.Com
4. Camara Laye. *The Black Child*. Amazon.Com
5. John K. Thornton. *The Kongolesse Saint Anthony Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita*. Amazon.com

Course Requirements:

1. Regular attendance, participation in in-depth class discussions, and contributing to a salutary class environment
2. Completion of a final exam
3. Final paper, 5 to 10 pages, typed and double-spaced
4. Completion of a mini-map project
5. Quizzes (at least four)
6. Museum visit. A three-page description/analysis of a pre-colonial African souvenir, i.e., clothing, pottery, metallic objects, etc.
7. Country Monitoring. Select one African country and report on it occasionally
8. 4 unexcused absences automatically dock your grade by one letter
9. The expected weekly reading runs at about 70-100 pages

The above basic requirements to be augmented by viewing the following:

1. A documentary, "The Journey of Man," by the distinguished geneticist, Spencer Wells. Employing the "bloodline," he proceeds to "map" human evolution by tracing San Bushman's descendents' diffusion from Africa to the rest of the world.
 1. "Wonders of the African World" by Harvard's Henry Louis Gates." This is a cinematic survey of the continent.
 2. "Golden Age of the Moor," a video by the fabled author, Ivan Van Sertima. The story of the Moors' conquest and rule of southern Europe for eight centuries.
 3. Taped lecture, "The Moors," also by Sertima. A tour de force outlining the Moorish contribution to the recovery of European civilization.

Policy on Absences. Here it is in order to quote the Department's Policy on absences: "The recognized grounds for absence are illness requiring medical attention, curricular or extracurricular activities approved by the faculty, personal obligations claimed by the student and recognized as valid, recognized religious holidays, and severe inclement weather causing dangerous traveling conditions."

"Any student who misses eight or more sessions through any combination of excused and unexcused absences will have missed more than a quarter of the class time and will not earn credit in this class. Such students should withdraw from the class to avoid an F."

NOTE: This being a double-period class that meets only once a week, the combination of excused and unexcused absences shall be four. Further, for the same reason, a student missing more than two classes will have his/her grade docked by a rung—for example from B+ to B, C+ to C. A student missing more than three classes will be duocked by a full level. For example, A to B, B+ to C+, etc.

Late assignments—papers and exams:

These shall be turned in on the date specified in class. If not cleared with instructor in advance, late assignment grades are subject to being lowered.

A word about Academic Integrity (Plagiarism, Cheating):

Students shall be required to sign the following University directive: "On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this exam (assignment)." Any infraction of this honor pledge shall be punished up to and including expulsion.

Grading method:

- 1. 20% based on final exam**
- 2. 20% based on final paper**
- 3. 20% on short papers**
- 4. 20 % on class discussions**
- 5. 10% on quizzes**
- 6. 5% on museum assignment**
- 7. 5% on country monitoring**

Course Description:

This is a survey of pre-colonial African history, presenting a panoramic treatment of the main themes and outlines of the development of African culture and society. It will aim to bring out a balanced exposition of the great local diversity and continental unity in African philosophy, religious thought and statecraft and to summarize the main features of the evolution of African Iron Age society, the rise and fall of ancient and Medieval states, early encounters with Europeans and the consequent growth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The narrative ends at about the 1870's when European intervention ended formal African independence.

A general survey course like this one, by definition, requires a kind of approach and emphasis that markedly differs from those of thematic courses concentrating on: an area of limited scope, a period, a topic, a gender, a group or even a single person. Moreover, a course designed to teach African history must take account of Africa's historical idiosyncracies. For example, whereas the European experience is shaped by Christianity and a common racial identity, that of Africa consists, without appearing to condescend, of a bewildering welter of conflicting ethnic, racial and religious identities. There are, to cite but one example, African Arabs who came with the rise of Islam in the 7th century and today dominate North Africa, having successfully replaced or absorbed the autochthonous population of Berbers. There is the Bantu "Nursery" south of the Equator, the Guinea type of the West coast, the Cushites of northeast Africa and the white Africans of south-Central Africa. And what does one make of the blond, blue-eyed peoples absconded in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco with German-sounding city names like Awdaghost. To account for the origins of this white enclave, one must have some familiarity with the barbarian invasions of Europe in the declining years of the Roman Empire, and the Vandals (not nice guys apparently, to judge by the name posterity gave them) who catapulted across the Ceuta littoral into Africa and ended up in northwest Africa. Then there are the Moorish North Africans who erupted in the 8th century and ruled southern Europe for nearly 8 centuries, and whose advance into Europe was halted by Charles Martel, or Charles the Hammer at the Loire river in central France. Without that signal victory, as Edward Gibbon reminds us, the "Koran," would be "taught" today in Europe, instead of the Bible. Thus, the Moors, too, come into the historical mix of pre-colonial Africa.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The issue of Learning Outcomes lies, in my view, at the heart of the entire pedagogical exercise. What are the testing tools to measure students' progress from, say, point A to point B? First, there are the tangible means of testing progress—through tests, quizzes, short papers, final paper and final exam. Then there are the intangibles, stemming from the dynamics of class discussions. By interacting with one another, through the guidance of the instructor, students shall learn the skills of content analysis—how to test the texts critically in order to squeeze out of them insights and understandings from the evidence they present. Further, the discussions enable students to marshal the ingredients of a class debate with a view to managing, if not mastering, the elements of an argument. Moreover, pursuant to a lecture, the instructor should encourage the students to critique his/her presentation without fear of retaliating punishment. Finally, conferencing with students—individually or in groups—during designated office hours, or by appointment, can impact the course of their careers.

Reading schedule (subject to change):

- I. Sept. 2. Introductory matters and Genesis of Man in Africa. Shillington, Pp. 1-14; Davidson, Pp. 1-24.**
- II. Sept. 9. Continue discussion of "Genesis" backed by Internet material:**

“Chad Man,” “Lucy,” “The Leakeys and the Oldovai Gorge.”

- III. Sept. 16. Iron Age Africa, Ancient Glories (Nile Valley Civilizations—Egypt, Nubia, Imperial Adsumetc). Shillington, Pp. 15-61; Davidson, Pp. 25-60.

Quiz

- IV. Sept. 23. Northeast Africa to 1000 A.D: Egypt Under Greek Rule, North Africa Under Roman Rule, the Spread of Christianity in North Africa, the Rise and Fall of Aksum, the Arab Invasions: the Nile Valley and the Maghrib, the Growth of Muslim States in Northern Africa. Shillington, Pp.62-77; Davidson, Pp. 61-86. Review/discussion: what have we learned so far?
- V. Sept. 30. Bilad al-Sudan (“The Land of the Blacks”). The Great Medieval West African States. Shillington, Pp. 78-106; Davidson, Pp. 87-140.
- VI. Oct. 7. “Epic of Sundiata.” Read whole book.
- VII. Oct. 14. The Cultures and Societies of Tropical Africa. Shillington Pp. 78-106 Davidson, Pp. 141-164.

Quiz

- VIII. Oct. 21. Eastern Africa to the Sixteenth Century. Cultures and peoples of East Africa. Shillington, Pp. 107-121; Davidson, Pp. 185-224.
- IX. Oct. 28. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Shillington, Pp. 171-180; Davidson, Pp. 126-137.
- X. Nov. 4. The Congo Basin; Bantu “nursery.” Shillington, 197-210; Davidson, Pp. 156-167. And New States in the Forest Regions of Tropical Africa: Oyo, Dahomey and Asante. Shillington, Pp. 181-196; Davidson, Pp. 167-184.
- XI. Nov. 11. Southern Africa: The black man’s struggle for a birthright in his land. Shillington, Pp. 212-225; Davidson, 265-271.
- XII. Nov. 18. The Congo in Crisis. Thornton, Pp. 1-104.
- XIII. Nov. 25. Saint Anthony arrives. Thornton, Pp. 105-160.
- XIV. Dec. 2. Laye. *The Dark Child*. Read whole book.

Quiz

- XV. Dec. 9. Review/Discussion: what have we learned?
- XVI. Dec. 16. Final Exam.
- Nov. 11. Museum and country monitoring due.
- Nov. 25. Accumulated short papers due.

Dec. 2. Final paper due.