HIST 115: The Civilizations of Africa to 1800
Spring 2016

Instructor: Willis Okech Oyugi
Class Times: TR 9:30-10:50AM
Office: Rice 303
Office Hours: TR 11:00-12:30 & by appointment
Instructor's email: wokechoy@oberlin.edu

The Riddle of Rhodesia

Zimbabwe

Great Zimbabwe & black slave offering gold to Queen of Sheba
(The Colony of Southern Rhodesia Government Poster, 1938)
Course Description

Africa, the cradle of humankind, lies at the heart of human history. Africa is the continent from which the ancestors of every one of us alive today came. Close to fifty thousand years ago, when a few Africans left the continent and began to spread across the globe, African history was World history! Thereafter, its peoples, just like their relations across the globe, followed similar pathways and proceeded at similar paces in contributing to the notable developments that mark the great transformations of world history, including: the transition from foraging to agricultural revolutions; the development of metallurgy; the shift from residing in small communities to living in big cities; from engaging in localized informal exchanges of goods and services to that of long-distance trade and commerce. Africans were vital participants and contributors to human developments in all ages. This story lies at the core of this course.

The central themes of the class will be how people in Africa mastered and used the environments in which they lived, how they organized their societies in different periods and places, and how they changed and developed in the face of shifting historical circumstances. We will explore the ancient historical roots of the great cultural diversity of the continent. Among the topics and themes of history we will consider as we progress forward in time toward the eighteenth century will be agricultural developments, technology, social change, political growth of scale, urbanization, trade and commerce, religion, and art and music.

In the first full week of the semester we will begin with a brief look at the African origins of humankind, and we will examine the baggage of mistaken ideas about the continent that nearly all of us bring with us to this topic. But our focus through the rest of the course will be on the immensely varied history of Africa between about 16,000 BCE (BC) and 1800 CE (AD). We will realize that besides ancient Egypt, which prior to 1000 CE is often glorified in Western fallacies as representing all that was “civilized” about Africa in many world history classrooms and texts, many other regions and societies across this expansive continent had more to offer to the great developments in world history.

Course Objectives

1). Students should be able to question popular and scholarly fallacies relating to precolonial African history;
2). Students should be able to engage with alternative methodological approaches to historical inquiry and research including oral historiography, archaeology, and historical linguistics;
3). Students should be able to analyze, write, and speak about precolonial African history using a variety of primary and secondary sources;
4). Students will improve critical thinking and writing.

Course Requirements and Grading

1. Class attendance and participation (20%)
2. Three reflection papers:
   a. The first (2-3pp) will be on methodology and will engage the two readings
assigned for Week 4 (due Feb 25 at the beginning of class). (10%)

b. The second assignment (2-3pp), will analyze at least one of the primary documents assigned for Week 9 (due March 31 at the beginning of class). (10%)

c. The third reflection paper (2-3 pages), should analyze at least one of the assigned primary documents [due April 19 at the beginning of class]. 10%

3. Mid-Term Exam [In two parks: March 15 & March 17] (total of 20%)
4. Two Map Quizzes (total of 10%)
5. Final Exam (20%)

Please note that all work must be completed in order to pass this course.
Grading will be as follows: A+100-97; A 96-93; A- 92-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-83; B- 82-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-73; C- 72-70; D 65-69, F below 65.

Class Format, Writing assignments, & Other Information
Our class meetings will feature a mix of lectures, documentaries, and group discussions. As the deadlines/dates for papers and exams approach, I will give you information that is more detailed about my expectations. Please keep the following in mind:

- I seek to respond to course-related emails within the shortest time possible.
- I am happy to discuss your assignments with you as you prepare them—the earlier the better. Email or come see me during office hours to talk about paper outlines, thesis paragraphs, or drafts (sent at least 48 hours before the deadline).
- Late papers will be penalized 3 points each day it is late. With the exception of the final term paper, I reserve the right to allow extensions on a case-by-case basis.
- Because participation is a significant part of your grade, and since the lectures complement the readings, attendance is mandatory and will be registered.
- I encourage you to take advantage of the writing resources Oberlin offers to you. The writing center located at Mudd Library offers individual assistance at any stage in the writing process.
- You must submit a hard copy of your paper in class. E-mail submissions will only be accepted under certain conditions. The paper must be typed in a 12-point font (Times New Roman), double-spaced, and must be cited appropriately using footnotes following the Chicago Manual of Style (I will give you more information in class).

**Honor Code: Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated.** I presume your familiarity with the college’s policies on cheating and plagiarism. Consequences can be dire and range from a failing grade on the assignment to expulsion. For more information on academic conduct familiarize yourself with the Student Honor Code available at: http://www.oberlin.edu/students/lirks-life/rules regs.html. Accordingly, the College requires that students sign the honor code for all assignments that reads: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.”

- Cell phones, laptops, iPads and other technological distractions are not welcome.
- Appropriate accommodation will always be granted to students with documented disabilities or those who feel they may have physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities. Please let me know early in the semester so that your learning accommodations can be taken care of. Any questions about the necessary process of documenting disabilities
should be addressed to Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters Hall).

- It is disruptive to your peers to arrive late to class or leave early. Please be unobtrusive if you really must do so.
- Please note that I would prefer to answer questions concerning grades during office hours or by appointment.

**Required Texts/Readings/Films**

Christopher Ehret’s *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002) will be our primary text. The text is available for purchase online and at the school bookstore. This text is also available electronically through the school library at:


In addition to our main text, the required readings include both scholarly articles on specific topics and primary sources. You can download these readings by clicking on the link to each author’s name from the class website on Blackboard (designated with [BB]). For the most part, we will use class time to view the course-related films and documentaries. It is, however, only by attending seminar that you will get the organizing chronological and thematic framework for the course as a whole.

**Documentaries/Films**

BBC’s *Lost Libraries of Timbuktu* (2012)

It will make a great deal of difference to your success in the class if you complete the assigned readings before each class meeting. I would also encourage you to think about the “questions for teachers and readers” in the Ehret book.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1: Introductions; Africa, Origins, & History**

2/2: Introductions & course expectations

2/4: Africa & World History, & Africa’s Geography
Read: Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, Ch. 1

**Week 2: African History, Cultures, Climates, and Natural Environments: An Overview; Prehistory to c. 9000 BCE**

2/9: Writing African History: An Overview
2/11: Ancient Ways of Life: Khoisan, Afrasan, & Niger Congo peoples before 9000 BCE

**Week 3: The Long Slow Revolution: African Inventions of Agriculture, 9000-3500 BCE**

2/16: Sudanic civilization and the African origins of agriculture

2/18: Niger-Congo peoples and West African agriculture
Read: Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, Ch. 3

*NB: Map Quiz 1. (based on Maps covered in lectures Wks 1-3)*

**Week 4: Diverging Paths in World History: 3500-1000 BCE**

2/23: Omotic and Cushitic peoples: Early agriculture in the Horn of Africa
Read: Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, Ch. 4

1st reflection paper due at the beginning of class.


2/25: New developments in agriculture and technology: Nubia & Egypt: the first age of states & towns

**Week 5: An Age of Commerce, An Age of Iron: 1000 BCE-300 CE**

3/1: Trade, towns, & kings in western and northeastern Africa
Read: Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, Ch. 5

3/3: Economic & cultural transformation in equatorial & southern half of Africa

Week 6: Africa in the Middle Centuries: Equatorial, Southern, & Eastern Africa, 300-1450 CE

Read: Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, Ch. 6.

3/10: Great Zimbabwe in the history of southern & eastern Africa

Week 7: MID-TERMS

3/15
Mid-Term Exam: Part 1

3/17
Mid-Term Exam: Part 2

Week 8: (Spring Recess, No Classes)

Week 9: Africa in the Middle Centuries: Northeastern, North Africa, and West Africa 300-1450 CE

3/29: Politics & religion: history in the Horn of Empire
Read: Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, Ch. 7, pp. 290-308; 330-336

3/31: Oral Tradition, Islam, and Arabic Literacy
Documentary: Lost Libraries of Timbuktu
2nd reflection paper (2-3 pages) due at the beginning of class. Based on at least one of the excerpts from Nehemia Levtzion and Jay Spaulding, Medieval West Africa: Views from Arab Scholars and Merchants (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003). (BB)

Week 10: An Age of Empires: West Africa, 300-1600 CE

4/5: Kingdoms of the Sahara
Read: Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, Ch. 7, pp. 309-329
Film: Basil Davidson's Caravans of Gold

4/7: Kingdoms of the forest

Week 11: Indian Ocean Africa I: Facing Two Worlds, 900-1400 CE
4/12: The Trading Settlements of the East African Coast  
Read: Graham Connah, The Edge or the Centre: Cities of the East African Coast and Islands.” In Connah, G., Africa Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 222. [BB]

4/14: East Africa’s gold and Europe’s Middle Ages  

Week 12: Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World: 1450-1640

4/19: Africans in the Early Atlantic Age  
Read: Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, Ch. 8

3rd reflection paper (2-3 pages) due at the beginning of class. NB. Based on any one of the following primary sources:  

4/21: Early Atlantic Age, African Middlemen, and African cities  

Week 13: Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World: 1640-1800

4/26: Africans in the Mid-Atlantic Age  
Read: Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, Ch. 9  
Discussion: Marcus Rediker, Ghosts of Amistad (Documentary)

4/28: States and Stateless Societies  
Read at least one of the following texts. Edna Bay, “From Dahomey’s Origins to 1740.” In Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dohomey (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 40-80 [ER]; Isaria Kimambo, “Political Evolution.” In Kimambo, I., A Political History of the Pare of Tanzania, c.1500-1900 (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), pp. 1-12. [ER]

Map Quiz 2 (Political/States)

Week 14: Indian Ocean Africa II: Facing Two Worlds, 1600-1800

5/3: African slaves and Muslims in New York  
Read: Michael Gomez, “New York City, Muslims, and the Indian Ocean; Preliminary Findings on the Connection via the Slave Trade.” Journal of African Development, 13, 1

5/5: Madagascar & the Comoros: Resistance and honor among “pirates”

**Week 15: Readings & Finals**

*Final Exam: TBA*