Instructor: Willis Okech Oyugi  
Class Times: Mon/Wed 2:30-3:45 PM; King 227  
Office: RICE 303; Office Tel: x56259  
Office Hours: MWF: 10:00-11:00 & by appointment  
Instructor’s email: wokechoy@oberlin.edu

Kimberley Diamond Mines, S. Africa, 1872  
Kimberley, S. Africa, 2015

Course Description/Goals

Whether real or imagined, postcolonial Africa has often been presented as a continent in perpetual environmental distress. Seemingly, Africa’s fair share of resource-related political upheavals that have been compounded by among other issues alarming rates of biodiversity loss, degrading soil erosion and unsustainable deforestation, ravaging droughts and famines, and epidemic diseases support this declinist view. This course broadly interrogates these challenges by grounding them in Africa’s recent environmental history from the late 1880s through 2000. The course does not presume prior knowledge of Africa.

Organized historically, thematically, and by case studies, the course identifies the key periods of colonialism, post-colonialism, and neoliberalism. Students will first be introduced to a broad overview of alternative methodological approaches to studying African environmental history. We will then explore other important topics such as the scramble for Africa’s resources, the interplay between power and contestations over resource extraction and use, globalization and the politics of biodiversity and environmental governance, gender, indigenous struggles, and environmental in/justice.

Our discussion will be informed by several questions including: How and why have fundamental ethical concepts such as social equality, property rights, procedural justice, and intergenerational equity been compromised through space and time? Besides, we live in an era of globalization that is currently dominated by debates on climate change and global warming. What of the
threats posed to Africa’s environments and its economies by globally-induced climate change?
What does the future hold for Africans’ livelihoods when their governments lack the political
leverage to challenge their highly developed counterparts in the West and China that
overwhelmingly contribute to this environmental dilemma?

By the end of the semester students should be able to:

1). Question popular and scholarly narratives of environmental knowledge and ideologies
in Africa, especially those that pertain to environmental determinism and degradation;

2). Engage with alternative methodological approaches to historical inquiry/research
including oral traditions and sources, ethnography, ecology, and archaeology;

3). Analyze, write, and speak about African environmental history;

4). Understand the global interconnections to Africa’s socio-economic, political, and
environmental history.

Class Format, Writing Assignments, & Other Information

Our class meetings will feature a mix of mini-lectures, documentaries, and group discussions.
As the deadlines for the Book Review and Term Paper assignments approach, I will give you
more detailed information about my expectations. Please keep the following in mind:

- 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 72 hours before the deadline).
- Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day and will only be accepted up to
one week after the due date. With the exception of the final term paper, I reserve the right
to allow extensions on a case by case basis.
- You should complete the weekly readings as scheduled prior to attending lecture. This
preparation will facilitate your ability to follow lectures and participate in class
discussions.
- 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 Center 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. 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/links-life/rules-regs.html. According to 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 in section.
- 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 disabilities may be appropriately met. 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.

**Required Texts/Readings/Films***

The following books are available at the Oberlin Bookstore. These texts have also been placed on print reserve, or are available electronically through Mudd Library (designated with “ER”) in the syllabus. All other readings are available on Blackboard (designated with “BB”) under “Course Documents” unless otherwise indicated. Documentaries will be shown in class. If for any reason you cannot acquire or access any of the reading texts/materials please contact me.


*Please note that the Book Review (2-3pp) will be based on either one of the last two texts.*

**Evaluation/Grading/Course Requirements**

- Map Quiz 5%
- Regular attendance and engagement in class discussions 25%
  - Includes 10% Blackboard submissions: question/comments/discussion concerning the weekly readings (due Wednesday by 12 pm from Week 2).
- Africa & the Environment in the News (ten 1-page analytical summaries) 10%
- Book Review 15%
- Final Exam 15%
- Research Term Paper (6-8pages) 30%

*Please note that all work must be completed in order to pass this course.*

**NO ONE WILL BE PERMITTED TO TAKE AN EARLY FINAL EXAM!**

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.
Please note that I would prefer to answer questions concerning grades during office hours or by appointment.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**¹

**Week 1: Introductions**
2/2: Introduction to the Course
2/4:
  [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb02588](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb02588)

**Suggested Readings**


**Week 2: Prehistory to 1900: Africans, Climate, and the Environment**
2/9

¹ Note: Course readings may be subject to minor changes. Please check with Blackboard for up-to-date information.

**Map Quiz (Feb 2/11)**

Week 3: The Underdevelopment of Africa: The Scramble for “Pleistocene” Africa

2/16


2/18


• King Solomon’s Mines (1950) trailer. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOuMWN7bFec

Week 4: State, Science & Knowledge: Mis-Reading the African Landscape

2/23


• James Fairhead & Melissa Leach, “Rethinking the Forest-Savannah Mosaic,” in Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns (eds.), The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment, (London: James Currey, 1996), pp. 105-121. (BB)

2/25


Week 5: Race: Environment, and the Politics of Identity

3/2

• David McDermott Hughes, “Whites Lost and Found: Immigration and Imagination in Savannah Africa,” in Environments at the Margin, pp. 159-184.


3¼


Week 6: Environmentalism, Conservation, and Displacement

3/9


March 11, Term Paper Proposal due in class

Suggested Reading

Week 7: Dis-ease in Africa

3/16

3/18

March 20, Book Review due (2-3pp). [Email to instructor by 5pm]

Suggested Readings
Week 8: (Spring Recess, No Class)

Week 9: Gender, ‘Equity’, and Environmental History of the Poor in Africa
3/30

4/1

**Term Paper Draft due in class (2-3pp).**

Week 10: Postcolonial Politics of Conservation and Environmental Policy
4/6

4/8
- Jane Carruthers, “‘Hunters of Elephants, Take Your Bow!’: A Historical Analysis of Nonfiction Writing about Elephant Hunting in Southern Africa,” in *Environment at the Margins*, pp. 73-94.

Suggested Readings

**Week 11: African Environments in the Post-Cold War**

4/13

• Amandar Hammar, “Sleepwalking Lands: Literature and Landscapes of Transformation in Encounters with Mia Couto,” in *Environments at the Margins*, pp. 121-140.

4/15

• Hebert Sauper’s *Darwin’s Nightmare* (Film)

**Week 12: Human-rights, Identity, and Corporate Environmentalism**

4/20


4/22


**Week 13: Re-Scramble for Africa; African Renaissance**

4/27


4/29

**Week 14: Pastoralism, Desertification, and Climate Change**

5/4

5/6

• **Research Term Paper due in class**

**Week 15: Reading and Finals**

5/16
• **Final in-class exam (Room TBA).**