INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN HISTORY SINCE 1800

Professor: Florence Bernault
Academic year 2017/2018: Common core curriculum – Spring semester

COURSE SCHEDULE

Session 1: Introduction. Political and Social Diversity in the mid-Nineteenth Century

January 31: Why study African history? What are the possibilities and limitations of a survey course? What are common misconceptions of Africa, Africans, and African history? How diverse were African societies and polities in the nineteenth century? How did African economies compare to European ones? What happened during the transition from the slave trade to emancipation and “legitimate” commerce?

Reading: Curtis Keim, Africans Live in Tribes, Don’t They?, 113-127

Session 2: Transitions in West Africa and in East Africa

February 7: What violent transitions took place in nineteenth century Africa? Which of these changes were externally and internally driven? Why did centralized empires of West Africa collapse in the nineteenth century? What explained the endemic insecurity in East Africa after 1800? Could an industrial “take-off” have happened in coastal Africa?

Reading: Marcia Wright, Chisi-Ndjurisiye-Sihyajunga, 81-90

Session 3: Transitions in Southern Africa

February 14: What was the broader significance of Shaka’s Mfecane in southern Africa? How did diamond and gold change the political stakes in Southern Africa? How did Whites reconcile after the Boer War, and disenfranchise non-white residents? What explains the weakness of African, Coloured and Indian political movements before World War II?

Session 4: Colonialism: Conquest and Uneven Hegemony

February 21: Why did the conquest begin in the 1880s? What factors motivated it? How did it vary from place to place? How did Africans respond to European encroachment and violence? What rationale underwrote colonial economies? How did Africans and Europeans (mis)understand each other?

Reading: Franz Fanon, On Violence, 1-62

Session 5: Colonial Transformations I: Race, Tribes, Land

March 7: How did Europeans try to stabilize colonial territories, populations and labor? Did they succeed? How did they seize land? How did Africans and colonialists invent tribes? Was Indirect Rule more protective of African institutions than assimilation or “direct” rule?

Reading:
- John Iliffe, The Creation of Tribes, 318-341
- Frederick Lugard, Indirect Rule in Tropical Africa, 228-238
- (Start the reading for next week)

Session 6: Colonial Transformations II: Gender and Social Conflicts in the City

March 14: Why did cities grow during colonialism, despite colonial efforts to control urban expansion? How did the city become a battlefield for resistance to colonial rule? Why did urban migration become a path of economic and social independence for women? What were the reasons for intensifying gender conflicts from the 1950s onwards?

Reading:
- Luise White, Prostitution, Identity and Class Consciousness in Nairobi, 255-273
- Lisa Lindsay, ‘No Need... to Think of Home?’ Masculinity and Domestic Life on the Nigerian Railway, c. 1940-61, 439-466

Session 7: Colonial Transformations III: Spiritual Battlegrounds

March 21: How did the religions of the book both strengthen and undermine colonial domination? What explains the radicalizing of Muslims in certain parts of Africa? Why did historical churches decline in the face of Pentecostal movements? What do scholars mean when they talk of “the modernity of witchcraft in Africa”?
Reading:
- Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar, “Secrets,” and “Power,” in Worlds of Power, 70-113
- John D. Y. Peel, Un siècle d'interactions entre islam et christianisme dans l'espace yoruba, 27-50

Session 8: Pan-Africanism & Negritude – Independence in Ghana

March 28: What were the major changes that Africans and Europeans experience during and after World War II? How did Pan-Africanism foster African independence? Who were the African elites able to exert pressure on colonial governments? Can we call them nationalists? Why did Nkrumah believe in mass action? Why did “Westernized” Africans harbor the most pronounced anti-colonial feelings?

Reading:
- Program of the Pan-African Congress, Manchester, 1945, 758-761
- Kwame Nkrumah, I Speak of Freedom, 1-39 & 95-110

Session 9: Settlers Colonies and Violent Decolonization: South Africa and Kenya

April 4: Who were the winners and losers in the Mau Mau war? Did the British understand Mau Mau as a political conflict? What was the rationale behind the Apartheid government’s idea of “Separate Development”? Why did the ANC resolve to use violence? Which factors contributed to pressuring De Klerk’s government in opening negotiations with Mandela?

Reading:
- Frederick Cooper, Africa since 1940, 133-155
- Freedom Charter 1955, 204-208
- Robert Sobukwe, Interview and Constitution of the PAC, 506-510

Session 10: 1994: A Year of Hope and Tragedy

April 11: How to discern between ethnic, political and economic factors in the Rwandan Genocide? How did the International Community react to the massacres? What challenges did the ANC government face at the dawn of the 1994 elections? What are the main problems plaguing the “New South Africa”?

Reading: Alison Des Forges, Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda, 1-30 (31-95 only FYI)
Session 11: Looking at Pandemics Historically

April 18: Why does Africa have the highest rate of HIV-AIDS infection? Did the coming of biomedicine during the colonial era contribute to the spread of epidemics, or did it help to contain them? How do Africans engage with public health, and why? With NGOs? Why did the South African government ignore the HIV-AIDS epidemic?

Reading: Stephanie Nolen, 28 Stories of Aids in Africa (excerpts TBA)

Session 12: Gate-Keeper States, Economic Growth and Crises

April 26: What is the problem with African governments and “weak states”? Is there a link between development and decolonization? Why did African states get into hyper-debt? To what extent is colonialism responsible for current crises in Africa?

Reading: Frederick Cooper, Development and Disappointment, 91-132; and The Recurrent Crises of the Gatekeeper State, 156-190

BIBLIOGRAPHY

TEXTBOOKS (Recommended only)


NOVELS

- Teju Cole, Every Day is for the Thief, New York: Random House, 2015
- Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nervous Conditions (First ed. 1988), Banbury, UK: Ayebia Clarke Pub., 2004

WORKS CITED

- Cooper, Frederick. Africa since 1940. The Past of the Present, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002
• Fanon, Franz. The Wretched of the Earth (1963: Présence africaine), New York: Grove Press, 2004
• Peel, John. « Un siècle d'interactions entre islam et christianisme dans l'espace yoruba, » Politique africaine, No 123 (2011), 27-50