

# **ANTHROPOLOGY OF AFRICA (070:243:01)**

## **SPRING 2020**

Tuesdays 3:55-6:55 PM, RAB 207 – New Brunswick

Professor Genese Sodikoff  
[sodikoff@rutgers.edu](mailto:sodikoff@rutgers.edu)

The African continent has long provided labor and raw materials to powerful players in the global economy, yet a majority of African societies has reaped little in return. Westerners have long tended to blame Africans for many of the devastating problems they face today, a view that is rooted in a lack of knowledge about the history and diversity of the continent. This course will challenge misconceptions of Africa and shed light on African societies through time by exploring central issues and debates in anthropology. Ethnographic and historical studies reveal how African peoples and environments have not only made the comforts of “the West” possible but have also contributed to our knowledge of society and culture. The course offers a comparative perspective of the ways Africans have organized kinship and politics, made a living, defined gender, constructed morality, imagined the afterlife, interpreted social and economic change, suffered and treated disease, conceptualized race, understood cultural difference, and confronted environmental change.

### **Learning Objectives**

- 1. Students will expand their knowledge of the diversity of African peoples and societies.
- 2. Students will understand of how life has changed on the African continent and be able to connect current events to their historical antecedents.
- 3. Students will learn to connect examples of ethnographic fieldwork with the key theoretical contributions of the anthropology of Africa.

### **Core Curriculum Learning Goals Met by this Course**

#### Contemporary Challenges

##### **Diversities and Social Inequalities [CCD] (3 credits)**

*Students must take one degree credit-bearing course that meets one or both of these goals.*

CCD-1. Analyze the degree to which forms of human differences and stratifications among social groups shape individual and group experiences of, and perspectives on, contemporary issues. Such differences and stratifications may include race, language, religion, ethnicity, country of origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, abilities, or other social distinctions and their intersections.

CCD-2. Analyze contemporary social justice issues and unbalanced social power systems.

### Areas of Inquiry

#### **Historical and Analysis [HST] (3 credits)**

*Students must take one degree credit-bearing course that meets one or both of these goals.*

HST-1. Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time.

HST-2. Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavors, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

#### **Social Analysis [SCL] (3 credits)**

*Students must take one additional degree credit-bearing course that meets one or both of these goals.*

SCL-1. Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.

SCL-2. Employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

## **GRADING CATEGORIES**

Weekly reading responses: 15%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Final Exam: 25%

Group documentary film: 20%

Attendance/participation (incl. current event): 15%

### WEEKLY READING RESPONSES

Every week, students will write reading response papers that include a discussion of 1) the author's argument or main point; 2) the evidence/data the author uses; 3) your own response to text (such as: what did you learn, what lacks or remains unclear, what associations can you make between this case and another, or what do you disagree with). The responses should be double-spaced and about ½ page per assigned text. Please include concrete examples.

### MIDTERM & FINAL EXAMS

The exams will cover readings, films, and lectures and will consist of a mix of short answers, fill-ins, and true/false questions. The final exam is non-cumulative and includes information since the midterm.

### ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance is mandatory. Please come prepared to discuss the readings in class and to ask questions related to lectures and films. Sometimes we will do in-class exercises as well. Each week, a student will be selected to bring in and summarize for the class a current event article about Africa.

### GROUP DOCUMENTARY FILM

Students will form groups of 3-4 people to explore one African society in depth around a particular theme (e.g. gender relations; fashion; popular music; healthcare). Each group will create a 15-minute documentary film that includes a variety of methods (e.g. interviews, archival film, re-enactment, graphs/charts). Ideally, they will incorporate interviews with people from the country of focus (Prof. Sodikoff will assist with contacts). Part of class time will be devoted to students working with their groups, and assignments for pieces of the documentary will occur throughout the semester.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

***NO TECHNOLOGY PREFERRED:*** Please instead take hand-written notes, which will help you retain information from lectures. It is too distracting to students, as well as impolite to speakers, to have students looking at phones and laptops. Exceptions can be made if necessary.

***NO PLAGIARISM:*** Copying other people's work and passing it off as your own is wrong and against university policy. If you do not use quotation marks around direct quotes, if you mish-mash scholarly works without attribution, if you submit partial or entire student papers as your own, if you fail to cite sources for information you use, you will be given a "0" on your assignment. This may well result in an F for the course.

***NO CHEATING:*** It goes without saying that having someone else submit work in your name is also against policy and will result in an F for the course. Also, using technology to look up answers or copying another's work during exams is strictly forbidden; doing so will result in an F.

***YES- ATTENDANCE:*** Attendance and punctuality are mandatory. Remember, this is a double-session course, so missing one class is equivalent to missing two sessions. Coming noticeably late or leaving noticeably early will also affect your attendance record. Missing more than two classes without documentation will result in 3 points being subtracted from your final grade percentage. Habitually missing class time will also result in points subtracted from final percentage.

***YES- COMMUNICATION WITH PROFESSOR:*** The best way to reach Prof. Sodikoff is by email. If you'd like to schedule an appointment, please email. Most importantly, if you are struggling with the class in any way, please get in touch early so you do not risk getting a poor grade or failing. Do not wait until the semester is nearly over to explain absences or a hardship. At that point, it is too late to remedy the situation.

***NO & YES-EXTRA CREDIT:*** There will NOT be opportunities for extra credit to individual students, but we will have two extra credit jeopardy quizzes.

## ASSIGNMENTS

(This is a guide. Please check CANVAS every week for any revised assignments.)

### WEEK 1 (1/21)-- HOW DOES "THE WEST" ENVISION AFRICA?

READ IN CLASS:

1. Wainaina, Binyavanga. 2005. "How to Write About Africa." *Granta* 92: The View from Africa. *Reproduced by permission of The Wylie Agency (UK) Ltd.*
2. Okeowo, Alexis. 2010. "Binyavanga Wainaina's Africa." *The New Yorker*. August 17.

### WEEK 2 (1/28): THE COLONIAL CONDITIONS OF AFRICANIST ANTHROPOLOGY

READ and WRITE RESPONSES for:

1. Apter, Andrew. 1999. "Africa, Empire, and Anthropology: A philological exploration of anthropology's heart of darkness." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28: 577-598.
2. Kenyatta, Jomo. (orig. 1938). Facing Mount Kenya excerpt.  
<https://www.newframe.com/from-the-archive-facing-mount-kenya/>

### WEEK 3 (2/4): WITCHCRAFT & MAGIC

READ and WRITE RESPONSES for:

1. Evans-Pritchard, E. "The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events."
2. Graeber, David. 1996. "Love Magic and Political Morality in Madagascar, 1875-1990." *Gender & History* 8(3): 416-439.

### WEEK 4 (2/11): ANCESTORS & SPIRITS

READ and WRITE RESPONSES for:

1. Kopytoff, Igor. 1971. "Ancestors as Elders in Africa." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 129-142.
2. Giles, Linda. 1995. "Sociocultural Change and Spirit Possession on the Swahili Coast of East Africa." *Anthropological Quarterly* 68(2): 89-107.

FILM IN CLASS: *I Am Not a Witch*, by Rungano Nyoni. (2017)

### WEEK 5 (2/18)– SLAVERY

READ and WRITE RESPONSE for:

1. Adu-Boahen, Kwabena. 2012. "The Impact of European Presence on Slavery in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth-Century Gold Coast." *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series*, No. 14, pp. 165-199.

2. Nicolini, Beatrice. 2014. "Power, slavery, and spirit possession in East Africa: A few reflections." *DADA Rivista di Antropologia post-globale*, 01 February 2014, Vol.IV (Special issue, n.1), pp.105-126.

## **WEEK 6 (2/25)– RACE**

READ and WRITE RESPONSE for:

1) Pierra, Jemima. 2013. "Race in Africa Today: A Commentary." *Cultural Anthropology* 28(3): 547-551.

2) Benton, Adia. 2016. "Risky Business: Race, Nonequivalence and the Humanitarian Politics of Life." *Visual Anthropology* 29:2, 187-203,

3) Durrington, Matthew. 2006. "Race, space and place in suburban Durban: an ethnographic assessment of gated community environments and residents." *GeoJournal* Vol. 66, No.1-2: 147-160.

## **WEEK 7 (3/3)–MATERIAL CULTURE & MIDTERM REVIEW**

READ and WRITE RESPONSE for:

1) Udvardy, Monica L; Giles, Linda L; Mitsanze, John B. 2002. "The Transatlantic Trade in African Ancestors: Mijikenda Memorial Statues (Vigango) and the Ethics of Collecting and Curating Non-Western Cultural Property." *American Anthropologist* 105 (3): 566-580.

2) Midterm Exam Review Sheet

IN CLASS FILM: *African Art - The Market of Masks* (Documentary of 2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5NEm5qwTAI>

## **WEEK 8 (3/10)– DOCUMENTARY GROUP PLANNING + MIDTERM**

## **WEEK 9 (3/17)-- SPRING BREAK**

## **WEEK 10 (3/24)—KINSHIP & GENDER & EXTRA CREDIT JEOPARDY QUIZ**

READ AND WRITE RESPONSES FOR:

1) Wiley, Katherine Ann. 2014. "Joking market women: Critiquing and negotiating gender and social hierarchy in Kankossa, Mauritania." *The Journal of the International African Institute* 84(1): 101-118.

2) King, Diane and Stone, Diane E. 2010. "Lineal masculinity: Gendered memory within patriliney." *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (MAY 2010), pp. 323-336

### **WEEK 11 (3/31)— HEALTH HISTORIES**

READ AND WRITE RESPONSES FOR:

- 1) Bogin, Barry. 2011. "Kung nutritional status and the original "affluent society" - a new analysis." *Anthropologischer Anzeiger*, Vol. 68, No. 4, Biological and Cultural Markers of Environmental Pressure (2011), pp. 349-366.
- 2) Giles-Vernik, Tamara, and Rupp, Stephanie. 2013. "PEOPLE, GREAT APES, DISEASE, AND GLOBAL HEALTH IN THE NORTHERN FORESTS OF EQUATORIAL AFRICA." In *Global Health in Africa: Historical Perspectives on Disease Control*. Edited by Tamara Giles-Vernik and James L.A. Webb. Ohio University Press.
- 3) Livingston, Julie. 2003. "Pregnant Children and Half-Dead Adults: Modern living and the quickening life cycle in Botswana." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 77(1): 133-162.

### **WEEK 12 (4/07)— DEVELOPMENT & UNDERDEVELOPMENT**

READ AND WRITE RESPONSES FOR:

- 1) Rodney, Walter. (orig. 1972). "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa." <https://ricenpeas.org/exposures/2017/7/7/how-europe-underdeveloped-africa-walter-rodney>
- 2) Ferguson, James. 2005. "Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa." *American Anthropologist* 107(3): 377-382.

### **WEEK 13 (4/14)— ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE**

READ AND WRITE RESPONSES FOR:

- 1) Naar, Nicole; and Mahenge, Jairos. 2014. "Finding a middle ground: Conservation challenges among stakeholders in coastal Tanzania." *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (February 2014), pp. 9-14.
- 2) Balehegn, Mulubhran. 2015. "Unintended Consequences: The Ecological Repercussions of Land Grabbing in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 57(2): 4-21.

### **WEEK 14 (4/21)— GROUP DOCUMENTARIES**

### **WEEK 15 (4/28)— WRAP-UP & EXTRA CREDIT JEOPARDY GAME**

## INFO FOR GROUP DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Select a country of focus

Identify interviewees (you can skype with and film contacts in africa)

Ask contacts to find other contacts

Develop a script for the documentary

Select roles (filming, editing, narration, scripting)

Investigate audio (music, ambient noise, volume)

Identify images to add, places to film

Experiment

### POSSIBLE THEMES (in addition to any theme of the syllabus):

CLIMATE CHANGE (hurricanes, famine, desertification, drought, perceptions of anthropogenic change, rebuilding after severe weather events, etc.)

THOUGHTS ABOUT ELECTIONS (feelings of powerlessness, or social change or corruption, etc.)

POPULAR MUSIC (power of lyrics or where people listen/dance to it, or influence of celebrities)

ART/FILM/DANCE/POETRY (who's creating it, what does it mean, how has it changed, etc.)

SPORTS (and it's contribution to... national pride, or construction of gender, or economic success etc.)

MINING (who owns the companies, who does the work, where do minerals go, etc.)

HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONS (symbolism, or how they are used in exchanges, beliefs about species, tourism impact, etc.)

MIGRATION/IMMIGRATION

LANGUAGE DEATH/LANGUAGE REVIVAL

EDUCATION

RELIGIOUS SECTS

CUISINE (symbolism of food, sociality of eating, cultivation of food sources, process of cooking, etc.)

ILLNESS/HEALING (traditional medicine, biomedicine, epidemiological change, etc.)