HIST 861: African Intellectual History

**DESCRIPTION**

This course invites students to explore histories of knowledge, ideas and intellectuals in Africa. We will take a capacious definition of intellectual, exploring the lives and work not only of writers and scholars, but also healers, spiritual leaders, scientists, revolutionaries and artists. Though the works that we will read will vary widely in terms of region and time period, several core questions will sustain our inquiry from week to week. Who is an intellectual? What is knowledge, and how is it generated and transmitted? How have some African intellectual traditions endured over time, even when faced with suppression and violence? How do ideas transform as they move from one context to another? What is the relationship between the material world and the world of ideas? Each week, we will explore how African thinkers have understood and created knowledge about a range of issues, including the natural world, health and healing, the slave trade, colonialism, God, technology, capitalism and beauty. Finally, this course will also consider methodological questions; for example, how do historians track the history of ideas in in the absence of written texts? How do historians uncover African perspectives in archives created by colonizers? How can historians assess the influence and reach of African intellectual traditions both within the continent and beyond?

**OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify key themes and methodological approaches to African intellectual history
- Demonstrate a deeper familiarity of the themes and debates within at least one more specialized subfield within African intellectual history
- Improve their skills in academic writing and textual analysis
- Apply the approaches of African intellectual history to their own area of research expertise

**COURSE CREDIT**
The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course’s learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), dedicated online time, reading, writing, field trips, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

**COURSE FORMAT**

Online, using BBCollaborate

**REQUIREMENTS**

1. Students are required to write a response paper each week. Ideally, response papers should succinctly summarize the key arguments of the book, but then move on to analyze key themes and questions raised by the text. Response papers should end with a discussion question for the group to consider. These response papers are due by 7pm on Monday evening. They should be between 1.5 and 2 single-spaced pages long.

2. Each student will lead discussion once during the semester. On the week that the student leads discussion, they will be responsible for discussing both the required text and briefly presenting a summary of the supplemental readings and how they relate to one another.

3. On the week that the student leads discussion, their response paper will be longer than usual, around 4-5 double-spaced pages. This will serve as a first draft of the final paper.

4. For the final paper, students will write a historiographic essay about one of the weekly topics on the syllabus. This paper will discuss both the required text and all the supplemental readings for that week. That paper should be 10-15 pages long.

**EVALUATION**

Participation: 25%
Response papers: 25%
Leading Discussion: 15%
First Draft of Historiography Essay: 10%
Final Paper: 25%

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

The following books have been ordered at the university bookstore. They can also be ordered through various online vendors and most of them are currently available for free online through the University of Wisconsin Library website.
• Joel Cabrita, *The People's Zion: Southern Africa, the United States and a Transatlantic Faith-Healing Movement*, (Harvard University Press, 2018)

• Kathryn M. de Luna, *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa*, (Yale University Press, 2016)


• Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa*, (Harvard University Press, 2016)


• Rudolph Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge and History in West Africa*, (UNC Press, 2014)

**ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES STATEMENT**

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a
student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: McBurney Disability Resource Center)

**SCHEDULE**

**September 8, Week 1: Introductions, Course Expectations and “Knowledge”**

Read:

**September 15, Week 2: Experts, Knowledge and Community Composition in Early African History**

Read:
Kathryn M. de Luna, *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa*, (Yale, 2016)

Supplemental Reading:


**September 22, Week 3: Longue Durée Intellectual Histories of the Sahel**

Read:
Ousmane Oumar Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa*, (Harvard 2016)

Supplemental Reading:


**September 29, Week 4: Education, Sufism and Way of Knowing in Modern West Africa**

Read:

*Supplemental Reading:*


Ousmane Oumar Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa*, (Harvard 2016)


**October 6, Week 5: African Intellectual History and the Atlantic World**

Read:

*Supplemental reading:*


**October 13, Week 6: Utopian Christian Imaginaries**

*Read:*


*Explore:*


*Supplemental readings:*


**October 20, Week 7: Print Culture and the Public Sphere in Colonial Africa**

*Read:*


*Supplemental readings:*


**October 27, Week 8: The Artist and the African Postcolony**

Read:  

Supplemental readings:


**November 3, Week 9: Technology, Knowledge and Power**

Read:  

Supplemental readings:


November 10, Week 10: Postcolonial Worldmaking

Read:

Supplemental readings:


November 17, Week 11: African Writers and the Cold War

Read:

November 24, Week 12: Historicizing Blackness

Read:

THANKSGIVING

Weeks 13-14: work on your final papers, meet with professor individually

FINAL PAPER DUE: DECEMBER 11, 2020, 5pm