



OVERVIEW

Welcome to Africa: An Introductory Survey. This course is designed to be a multi-disciplinary introduction to the history, cultures, and politics of Africa. It is available to students as African Cultural Studies 277, Afro-American Studies 277, Anthropology 277, Geography 277, History 277, Political Science 277, or Sociology 277. Because Africa contains a remarkable array of languages, societies, and peoples, we cannot hope for exhaustive coverage. However, we will visit almost every major region of the continent at least once during the semester while we will explore a variety of themes and topics. I hope that you will take away from the course an understanding not just of *what* to think about the history, cultures, and politics of Africa but also *how* to think about this part of the world.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- ◇ **Develop** a deeper understanding of the complexities of historical and contemporary Africa
- ◇ **Become** familiar with the study of Africa from different disciplinary perspectives
- ◇ **Critically** engage a variety of media about Africa
- ◇ **Learn** to read works of scholarship with an eye for identifying the argument
- ◇ **Analyze** sources and employ these sources to develop an argument
- ◇ **Enhance** writing skills

In-Person Lectures: Mon and Wed, 9:55-10:45, L196 Education Online Lectures: Friday (asynchronous)

INSTRUCTOR

Neil Kodesh
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Department of History

In-Person Office Hours
Monday, 11:30-1:00
Appointment required via [Calendly](#)
5115 Humanities

Virtual Office Hours via Zoom
Monday, 11:30-1:00
Tuesday, 12:00-2:00 PM
Appointment required via [Calendly](#)

TEACHING ASSISTANTS

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OUR CLASSROOM

I firmly believe that the classroom should be a place of exploration that supports and respects a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences. As your instructor, I am committed to creating a classroom environment that welcomes all students, regardless of race, gender, religious beliefs, etc. We all have implicit biases, and I will try to continually examine my judgments, words, and actions to keep my biases in check and treat everyone fairly. I hope that you will do the same, and that you will let me know if there is anything I can do to make sure everyone is encouraged to succeed in this class.

COMMUNICATION

The Announcements section of the Course Home page is used to make important announcements. We expect you to login to the course site regularly and to read the news items carefully.

Have a question? Consider posting it on the “General Course Questions” discussion board instead of sending an email. Chances are your classmates have similar queries and we are all here to support each other! As instructors, we want to provide all of you with the same information. We will do our best to respond to questions within 24 hours. If posting the question would make you uncomfortable, feel free to email me or your TA directly.

OFFICE HOURS

We are here to help! Office hours let you work one-on-one with the professor or TA on your specific course needs. They are also an opportunity to get to know your professors or TA, discuss academic or professional pursuits, or work through any challenges you may be encountering. Attending office hours is a great way to connect with me. These can be virtual or in person (see previous page for office hours).

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

[The History Lab](#) is a resource where expert PhD students work with you on your projects 1-on-1. No matter your stage in the writing process—choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts—the History Lab staff will help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Visit our website early and often to schedule an appointment with a Lab TA or to find writing tips, guides, and resources.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the rights of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. Faculty and students share responsibility in the accommodation process. Students are expected to inform faculty of their need for instructional accommodations during the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible after being approved for accommodations. Faculty will work either directly with the student or in coordination with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable instructional and course accommodations.

COURSE DESIGN, REQUIREMENTS, and EXPECTATIONS

This course will meet the 4 credits requirement by spending a total of 180 hours on learning activities. These include attending in-person lectures on Monday and Wednesday, viewing an online lecture-video on Friday, participation in discussion sections, engaging with learning materials, writing, and studying.

Course Design

Information about course schedule, logistics, technology, and student support can be found on Canvas in Module 0: Introduction and Course Overview

This course consists of 15 modules (1 module per week; modules open on Saturday at 8 AM each week):

- Module 1: Introduction to Africa
- Module 2: Themes in Early African History
- Module 3: Africa in the Age of Global Capitalism: The Atlantic Slave Trade
- Module 4: The Long 19th Century
- Module 5: Colonialism
- Module 6: Art and the Arts
- Module 7: Decolonization and its Aftermath
- Module 8: Politics Trends since Independence
- Module 9: Postcolonial Economies
- Module 10: Race and Genocide in Rwanda
- Module 11: South Africa: A Case Study
- Module 12: Popular Culture
- Module 13: Health, Disease, and Medicine
- Module 14: Science, Technology, and Environment
- Module 15: Conclusions: Africa in the World Today

Each module contains the following two components:

- **Lectures:** Lectures will take place in person on Monday and Wednesday from 9:55-10:45 in L196 Education, and online asynchronously for Friday. Since one goal of this course is to introduce you to Africa from a variety of different disciplinary perspectives, the course incorporates some recorded guest lectures from a range of Wisconsin faculty members engaged in the study of Africa. This format allows for greater breadth and variety in the subject matters covered. However, it also requires you to think more actively and creatively about how all of the different orientations, styles, and perspectives presented might be reconciled...or not.

I expect faithful attendance at lectures. Please note that to facilitate a comfortable learning environment for all, recording devices of any sort will be permitted only with the instructor's consent. All cell phones and other devices should also be turned off during class sessions. Students wishing to use laptop computers to take notes may do so, but please stay focused on the course.

- **Learning materials:** All required learning materials (readings, videos, films, podcasts, etc.) are available on Canvas. We have tried to select learning materials that will not only inform but also capture your curiosity and imagination. When reading an assignment, watching a film, or listening to a podcast, concentrate on the subject at hand, but think at the same time about how the ideas being presented connect with earlier lectures or learning materials, support them, or perhaps contradict them. Your sources will not always agree. Nor should they always agree. Remember throughout that one of the objectives of the course is for each of you to come away with a deeper understanding of the complexities of historical and contemporary Africa.

Discussion Sections and Participation (20%)

In addition to attending/watching lectures, all students will attend a weekly in-person discussion section. You must be enrolled formally in one of the scheduled discussion sections and attend that section every week. If you are not enrolled in a discussion section, you are not enrolled in the course. A teaching assistant (TA) will lead each discussion section. The TAs are PhD students who have had considerable life experience in Africa and are carrying out Africa-related research. You can learn more about your TA in the “Meet your Teaching Assistants” section located in Module 0 on the course’s Canvas site.

Weekly discussion sections will provide an opportunity for you to review and sort out ideas presented in lectures, lead conversation and debate, analyze readings and other learning materials, and prepare for assignments. Attendance and participation are required.

I have assigned readings and other learning materials for each module. You are expected to listen to, read, and watch everything that’s been assigned. The learning materials are pegged to corresponding lectures in a logical way, but rarely will they merely repeat what a lecture has covered. Lectures and learning materials are intended to be complementary.

I have tried to select learning materials that will not only inform but also capture your curiosity and imagination. Please bring questions about the week’s lectures and learning materials to discussion. If you are having trouble understanding something, other students probably are as well. So don’t be shy about asking questions. **Please be aware that the assigned learning materials for any given week will generally be discussed in section the following week.**

Participation grades will be based on attendance and active participation in class and section, which includes group discussions and other activities. **You will be responsible for grading your own participation.** I want you to feel empowered about your participation grade, as we are aware that students have different participation styles. Keep track of your attendance, contributions to class discussions, responses, etc. At the end of the semester you will submit a self-assessment. As long as it squares with your TA’s assessment, then you’ll receive the grade you submit.

Short Weekly Assignments (10%)

As part of your participation in discussion sections, each week you will be responsible for a short assignment related to the lectures and learning materials for the week. You will find instructions for these assignments in the weekly module on Canvas under the “Discussion” header. You must post these assignments by Sunday evening at 7 PM. These short assignments will help guide our discussions and also build toward the more substantial writing assignments.

Weekly posts will be graded on a scale of 1-3 points:

3 points: thoughtful engagement with the course material for the week

1-2 points: inadequate engagement with the course material for the week

0 points: no attempt made or off-topic response

Check-In Quizzes (30%)

Instead of a traditional midterm and final exam, this course will have five low-stakes “check-in quizzes” (each valued at 6% of your final grade). These quizzes will test that you are attending lectures and keeping up with readings and other learning materials. If you attend lecture and section regularly, read and listen to the assigned material, take good notes, and review those notes, you should do well on these. The quizzes will be given on Canvas approximately every three weeks. They will consist of a number of multiple choice questions related to material from the previous 2-3 weeks of class (the time between that quiz and the one before it). The quizzes are open-book and open-note, but your work must be your own. On the weeks where quizzes are assigned, they will open Wednesday morning at 8 AM and must be completed by Friday at 11:59 PM.

Primary Source Analysis (15%)

This first essay assignment (3-4 pages, double-spaced) will ask you to analyze a primary source related to the material covered during the first five modules of the course. In this analysis, you will think about who created the source you are examining and for what purpose; what the source can tell us about the past; how the source relates to the other sources we’ve engaged in the course; and how does the text allow you to contextualize the historical moment in which it was produced. You will receive detailed instructions about the assignment on October 6. **The essay will be on Friday, October 13 by 11:59 PM.**

Final Essay (25%)

For your final assignment, you will write an analytical essay (6-7 pages, double-spaced) on a topic related to material from one or more modules in the course. The assignment will offer the option of incorporating an analysis of [Insistent Presence](#), an exhibition of contemporary African art at the Chazen Museum. The curator of the exhibit, Maragaret Nagawa, will visit our class on October 11 and you will visit the exhibit during discussion section in week 7. You will receive detailed instructions during week 10 of the semester. **The assignment will be due on Friday, December 15 by 11:59 PM.**

EVALUATION and GRADING

Evaluation

Assignment	% of Final Grade	Due Date
Discussion Sections and Participation	20%	Weekly
Weekly Posts	10%	Weekly
Check-in Quizzes	30%	~every 3 weeks
Primary Source Analysis	15%	October 13
Final Essay	25%	December 15

Grading Scale

A	AB	B	BC	C	D	F
93-100%	87-92.9%	82-86.9%	77-81.9%	72-76.9%	67-71.9%	0-66.9%

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: September 5-8	Module 1: Introduction to Africa
Week 2: September 11-15	Module 2: Themes in Early African History: Urbanism and Complexity
Week 3: September 18-22	Module 3: Africa in the Age of Global Capitalism: The Atlantic Slave Trade
Week 4: September 25-29	Module 4: The Long 19th Century
Week 5: October 2-6	Module 5: Colonialism
Week 6: October 9-13	Module 6: Art and the Arts
Week 7: October 16-20	Module 7: Decolonization and its Aftermath
Week 8: October 23-27	Module 8: Political Trends since Independence
Week 9: October 30- November 3	Module 9: Postcolonial Economies
Week 10: November 6-10	Module 10: Race and Violence in Rwanda
Week 11: November 13-17	Module 11: South Africa: A Case Study
Week 12: November 20-24	Module 12: Popular Culture
Week 13: November 27- December 1	Module 13: Health, Disease, and Medicine
Week 14: December 4-8	Module 14: Science, Technology, and Environment
Week 15: December 11-13	Module 15: Africa and the World Today

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) and ACADEMIC HONESTY

ChatGPT and other AI programs are now available to help create text. These can be useful tools, but they are far from perfect. They often produce factually inaccurate and flawed material, some of which is effectively plagiarized from other sources. In addition, the use of these programs may stifle your own independent thinking and creativity. Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences teach you how to conduct different kinds of research, organize ideas and data, and formulate structured arguments. Writing is where these skills all come together. The very process of writing develops your ability to analyze, argue, and present. Writing is a process, and we learn to think through problems and develop understanding and analysis as we write. It is an essential part of your education and intellectual development.

In this class you are welcome to use AI programs to help you brainstorm ideas or edit your own writing. However, you must then fact-check, edit, and rewrite to ensure that what you submit is accurate and your own work. **The representation of AI-generated responses as your own work is a violation of this course's expectations and will be addressed through UW–Madison's [academic misconduct policy](#).** If you are concerned that you might be unintentionally plagiarizing or are unclear on how to avoid it, please reach out to me or your TA to discuss citations and how to use sources appropriately.