

Women in African History

History 213-01



Angolan woman, 1780s

Fall 2011
MWF 1:10-2:10
Carnegie 208
Office Hours: Mon & Wed 2:30-4:00 and by appointment

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Course Description:

This course is a thematic exploration of some of the roles women have played in Africa over the last five hundred years. Through broader historical studies as well as individuals' life stories, we will examine some of the activities and actions of women as well as the ways in which other actors, such as men within their societies and the colonial state, tried to control women's access to wealth, state resources, and authority. We will study the ways in which women responded and some of the desires, limitations, and necessities that drove their actions. Some of the themes we will cover include women in slavery and slave societies, women's religious and political power, and women's interactions with the colonial state.

Course Goals:

By the end of this course, you will:

- Be able to evaluate an author's argument based on sources and evidence
- Be able to read critically and distinguish between accepted truths and an author's opinions
- Recognize the diversity of women's experiences across the continent of Africa and over time
- Recognize that history is a study of change over time, and all societies are constantly adapting to internal and external pressures, so that there is no "timeless past," but a complex historical web of shifting beliefs, practices, behaviors, and interactions.

Outside the Classroom:

A significant portion of the course is on Moodle, including readings, reflections submissions, forums for questions, and the latest version of the syllabus. I will also use your Mac email for correspondence, so please check it regularly or have it forwarded to your main email account.

I will be in my office most days, but am more regularly available by email than by phone. You are always welcome to use the Google Chat feature if you see me online. I encourage you to contact or visit me for any questions, concerns, or comments you have about the course.

Required Texts:

- Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*
- Sandra Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe*
- Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960*
- Lynn M. Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya*
- Sindiwe Magona, *To My Children's Children*
- Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol*

All texts are available at the bookstore and on reserve in DeWitt Wallace Library. You can also find them from online vendors such as Amazon.

Requirements:

- *Participation:* Discussions will constitute a significant portion of this course, so you are expected to come to class having completed the readings and ready to listen and contribute. I do expect you in class every day, but you are allowed two free absences. After that, you must speak to me and get special approval. Because so much of the course is discussion, missing classes will affect both your participation grade and your ability to learn the material.
 - To help you prepare, you will submit reading reflections on Moodle before most classes; these reflections are graded for completion (if you do it, you get credit). You must complete at least 22 (out of 27) graded reflections, including the books.
 - The use of electronic materials in class (phones, tablets, laptops, etc) can be distracting for both the user and those in the vicinity. If this becomes a problem, I will disallow their use.
 - *Map Quiz:* The map quiz will include all the states in Africa and will be September 16. It will factor into your participation grade.
- *Essay #1:* This will involve both individual research and partnered work. In pairs, each student will research how a specific episode of change affected women in an African society. The partners will then produce a comparative essay and present their findings to the class on October 14. I will provide more information in class.
- *Midterm Exam:* Your midterm will be take-home, and is due in class October 26.
- *Essay #2:* This essay will address an issue in African women's history. You will evaluate key arguments and present your own argument, supported by evidence, on the topic. You will hand in a draft November 23 and will submit the final copy during your in-class presentation December 9. I will provide more information in class.
- *Final Exam:* The final is Friday, December 16 from 1:30-3:30.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation: 25%

Essay #1: 20%

Take-Home Midterm: 15%

Essay #2: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Special Needs and Accommodations:

If you have any special needs or require accommodations for this course please let me know as soon as possible so that I can work with you to make the appropriate arrangements.

If you have a documented disability, I encourage you to make an appointment with the Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman, at 696-6220. Visit www.macalester.edu/studentaffairs/disabilityservices for more information.

Honor Policy

All scholarly work, including the essays you will write for this class, involves building on the ideas and help of others. It is very important, however, to understand how to give credit to other people's words and ideas. Broadly:

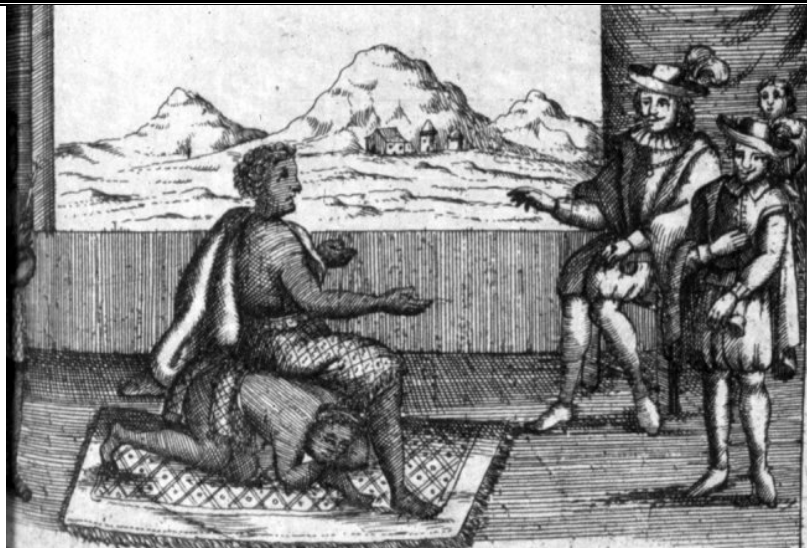
Don't claim the ideas or words of someone else as your own. Do use the ideas and words of others to help develop your own. Do have friends read and comment on drafts of your papers. Always give explicit credit when you use anyone's exact thoughts or language, whether in paraphrasing or quoting them. Give an acknowledgment to someone who's helped you overall. Intellectual work is about developing and sharing your ideas, and it's about taking note of and praising other people who have shared good ones with you.

-Richard Wightman Fox, "A Heartbreaking Problem of Staggering Proportions," *The Journal of American History* (March 2004), 19.

Please refer to <http://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/integrity.html> for information on Macalester's Academic Integrity policies. You are responsible for understanding what constitutes a violation and the consequences.

Late Submissions

Because reading reflections are designed to facilitate class discussions, and because not all of them are required, I will not accept late submissions unless you have extenuating circumstances and receive my approval. I expect the essays to be handed in on time, typed and in hard copy, the day they are due. If you need an extension you must speak with me in advance. I will penalize late papers.



Queen Nzinga of the Kongo greeting some Portuguese, 1690

PART I: Introduction to Women in African History

WEEK 1: Introduction: Context and Framing

What ideas about Africa and women do we bring to the study of women in African history? How do these preconceptions influence the way we study these histories?

September 7: Introduction: Context and questions

- [Wainaina Binyavanga, "How to Write about Africa"](#)

September 9: Gender Studies in Africa

- Eileen Boris, "Gender After Africa!" in *Africa After Gender?*, (2007), 191-204

WEEK 2: Sex and Gender

How do we study women in African History? What does it mean to be an African woman? What can the study of African history teach us about ideas of sex and gender?

September 12: Different Approaches

- Oyeronke Oyewumi, "Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects," in Oyeronke Oyewumi, *African Gender Studies*, 2005, pgs 3-21

September 14: Status and Roles

- Niara Sudarkasa, "The "Status of Women" in Indigenous African Societies," from *Readings in Gender in Africa*, (2005), 25-31 (ebook).

September 16: Considering Subjectivity

- Nwando Achebe and Bridget Teboh, "Dialoguing Women," in *Africa After Gender?* (2007), 63-81

*****MAP QUIZ*****



Female soldier, Dahomey, 1850

PART II: Women in Pre-colonial Africa

WEEK 3: Slavery in Africa

What is the place of women in the history of slavery in Africa? How did women participate in the domestic trade and economy, as slaves and slave owners?

September 19: Women in Histories of Slavery

- Claire Robertson and Marsha Robinson, “Re-Modeling Slavery as if Women Mattered,” Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph Calder Miller, *Women and Slavery: The modern Atlantic*, 253-283.

September 21: Violence and Power: The “Amazon” Warriors of Dahomey

- Excerpts from Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*, pgs 1-27; 40-71.

September 23: Experiencing Slavery in East Africa: Discussion

- Marcia Wright, “Mama Meli,” in *Women in African Slavery*, 91-121

WEEK 4: The Slave Diaspora: Trans-Atlantic Slavery

What was unique about the experience of women in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade? Why were women valued, and how did they utilize this to gain autonomy? How did their backgrounds in Africa influence women slaves’ experiences in the Americas?

September 26: The Coastal Trade

- Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women*, Intro-Chapter 3 (1-106)

September 28: African Women in the Americas: Discussion

- Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women*, Chapter 4-Epilogue (107-201)

September 30: Free Class for Partner Work

WEEK 5: Religious Authority and Power

How is religious power gendered in African societies? How are sex and gender given power? What does this say about the place of women in some African societies?

October 3: Spirituality and Power

- Emmanuel Akyeampong and Pashington Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3. (1995), pp. 481-508

October 5: Bringing Religious Change: The Role of Women

- J. D. Y. Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 32, Fasc. 2, The Politics of Mission (May, 2002), pp. 136-166

October 7: A Muslim Scholar

- Excerpts from Beverly B. Mack and Jean Boyd. *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe*, 2000.

WEEK 6: Social Roles in West Africa

How did women shape their social relationships? What constraints did they face, and what advantages did they possess? How were women instrumental in and subject to social change?

October 10: Social Relationships

- Sandra Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast*, Intro-Chapter 3 (1-107)

October 12: Women in Anlo-Ewe Society: Discussion

- Sandra Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast*, Chapter 4-Conclusion (108-184)

October 14: In-Class Presentations

*****ESSAY #1 DUE*****



Demonstration of practical nursing, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

PART III: Women during the Colonial Era

WEEK 7: Rethinking Power

How did women gain and use authority and power in Northern Igboland? What types of power did they possess? What were some of their limitations and advantages? How did bridewealth contribute to a woman's relative power within a marriage and community?

October 17: Opportunities for Power

- Nwando Achebe. *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, Preparation-Chapter 2 (1-107)

October 19: Power in Igboland: Discussion

- Nwando Achebe. *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, Chapter 3-Conclusion (109-230)

October 21: Bridewealth and Marriage Rights

- Barbara Cooper, "Women's Worth and Wedding Gift Exchange," from *Marriage in Maradi: gender and culture in a Hausa society in Niger, 1900-1989*, 90-109

WEEK 8: Colonial Courts

How did men and women negotiate the "imposition" of colonial courts? How did the terrain of power and marriage rights shift as a result?

October 24: Using Colonial Courts

- Sean Hawkins, "'The Woman in Question': Marriage and Identity in the Colonial Courts of Northern Ghana, 1907-1954," in Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi, *Women in African Colonial Histories*, 2002, pgs 116-143

October 26: Reflections

*****MID-TERM EXAM DUE*****

October 28: FALL BREAK; NO CLASS

WEEK 9: Controlling Women: State Power in East Africa

How did colonial states seek to control the movement and behavior of women? How did women respond and resist? What sorts of new constraints and opportunities did colonial rule present?

October 31: Prostitutes

- Nakanyike Musisi, “Gender and the Cultural Construction of “Bad Women” in the Development of Kampala-Kibuga, 1900-1962,” in Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy, *“Wicked” Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, 171-187.
- Louise White, “Livestock, Labor, and Reproduction: Prostitution in Nairobi and the East African Protectorate, ca. 1900-1918,” in *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*, 29-50.

November 2: Colonial Politics and Cultural Identities in a Settler Society

- Lynn M. Thomas, *Politics of the Womb*, Intro-Chapter 3 (1-102).

November 4: Contesting Women’s Bodies: Discussion

- Lynn M. Thomas, *Politics of the Womb*, Chapter 4-Conclusion (103-186).

WEEK 10: Labor, Fashion, and Race: Southern Africa

How did women figure into the migrant labor economy? How did the changing labor and urban relations influence women, and visa versa? How did women experience Apartheid?

November 7: Mining Camps and Female Mobility

- Lynette A. Jackson, ““When in the White Man’s Town”: Zimbabwean Women Remember *Chibeuira*,” in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, 191-215.

November 9: Sex and Beauty

- Lynn Thomas, “The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability in 1930s South Africa,” *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), pp. 461–90.
- Sindiwe Magona, *To My Children’s Children*, pgs 1-59.

November 11: Life and Labor: Discussion

- Sindiwe Magona, *To My Children’s Children*, pgs 60-167.

WEEK 11: Market Women

What types of power did women possess through their work in markets, and how were these secured? What sorts of influence did they possess, and what sorts of constraints did they face?

November 14: Taxation and The Women’s War

- Misty L. Bastian, ““Vultures of the Marketplace”: Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* (Women’s War) of 1929,” in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, 260-281.

November 16: Market Women and Politics

- Gracia Clark, "Gender and Profiteering: Ghana's Market Women as Devoted Mothers and "Human Vampire Bats"," in *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, 293-311.

November 18: Video: Asante Market Women

WEEK 12: Midwives and Mothers

How did the colonial state view African women as mothers? What sorts of policies did the state introduce, and how did women experience them? What ideas of childbirth and mothering did African women possess, and how did they persist or change during this period?

November 21: Birthing Babies

- Jane Turrittin, "Colonial Midwives and Modernizing Childbirth in French West Africa," in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, 71-91

November 23: Motherhood and Infant Health

- Nancy Rose Hunt, "Le Bebe en Brousse": European Women, African Birth Spacing and Colonial Intervention in Breast Feeding in the Belgian Congo," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1988), pgs. 401-432

*****ESSAY #2 DRAFT DUE*****

November 25: THANKSGIVING; NO CLASS



Celebrating plans for independence, Tanzania

PART IV: Women in the Era of Independence

WEEK 13: Women and Nationalism

How did women express themselves in the nationalist movements of the 1940s-60s? How did womanhood become a contested terrain, and in what ways (and by whom) was it contested?

November 28: Visualizing Nationalism: Fashion

- Dior Konaté, "Women, clothing, and politics in Senegal in the 1940s-1950s," in Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Material women, 1750-1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices*, 2009

November 30: Gender Relations in a Shifting Terrain

- Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol*, 12-63.

December 2: Negotiating Modernity and Womanhood: Discussion

- Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol*, 63-151.

WEEK 14: Post-colonial debates and the legacies of Colonialism

What are some of the opportunities and challenges women have faced since independence? How do these build on historical experiences?

December 5: Marriage rights

- Andrew Ivaska, ““Marriage Goes Metric”: Negotiating Gender, Generation, and Wealth in a Changing Capital,” in *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar Es Salaam*, 166-205.

December 7: The Politics of Environmental Rights: The Green Belt Movement

- Wangari Maathai, “An Unbreakable Link: Peace, Environment, and Democracy,” *Harvard international Review* (Winter 2008), 24-27
- Bessie House-Midamba, “Gender, Democratization, and Associational Life in Kenya,” *Africa Today*, Vol. 43, No. 3, Reconceptualizing African Women: Toward the Year 2000 (Jul. - Sep., 1996), pp. 289-305

December 9: In-Class Presentations

*****ESSAY #2 FINAL COPY DUE*****

WEEK 15: Wrapping Up

December 12: Review and Final Thoughts

December 16: FINAL EXAM, 1:30-3:30