Africa and the United States:  
From the Atlantic Slave Trade to Black Panther

TERM: Spring 2020
EMAIL: mps7@williams.edu
CEL: 585-278-4855
OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays 3–5pm or other times by appointment.

For office hours, you may schedule a specific time through “Signup Sheets” in Glow or simply click on my Zoom meeting link (emailed out and available on Glow) anytime between 3pm and 5pm on Wednesdays. I am also happy to ‘meet’ over the phone or through others apps. If you would like to meet at a different time or via a platform other than Zoom, just send me an email.
COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the history of Africa since the eighteenth century by exploring the connections between the African continent and United States. By taking a Pan-African and international approach, the class will highlight how the histories of both places have been deeply intertwined. The course is organized around four themes. The first is the impact of African enslavement on both continents and the way African social practices were carried across the ocean and transformed by slavery and abolition. We will then turn to the “back to Africa” movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and explore why different groups of African-Americans sought to return to the continent of their origin, and what impact this had on those living in Africa. The third theme is the deepening involvement of American missionaries, the US government and non-governmental organizations in Africa, which accelerated in the twentieth century. The final section explores the important links between Black freedom movements in the United States and anti-colonial and anti-apartheid movements in Africa. The course will conclude with a consideration of the current state of Africa-US connections in light of the recent blockbuster film, Black Panther.

Difference, Power, and Equity notes:

This course fulfills the Difference, Power, and Equity requirement. This course focuses on the effects of racism and colonialism on different peoples of African descent and key episodes when Black solidarity was forged across great physical distance between the United States and Africa, as well as episodes where it was compromised (by forms of difference based on place of birth, language, religion, and class.) Through class readings, discussion, and the final group project, the course will help students assess what foundations have allowed for trans-Atlantic collaboration both among people who trace their heritage to Africa and between people with different racial backgrounds.

REQUIRED BOOKS

The following books are required for the course and may be purchased from the Williams College Bookstore, or through various online sites.


  - All other assigned readings are available in the course packet and will be posted on Glow.
ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT [This page fully updated]

Post-spring break, all of the following assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. (These expectations may be adjusted in discussion with Prof Swagler.)

Class Participation
The remainder of the course is organized into six topics, each lasting one week. To pass, you will need to participate in (at least) 4 out of the final 6 weeks of the class. Participating now means reading/viewing the assigned materials, then posting and responding in that week’s discussion on Glow with the other members of your discussion group. (The class will be split into two discussion groups.)

You may also join optional 45-minute weekly videoconferences on Fridays with your discussion group. This is an opportunity for ‘face-to-face’ interaction with me and your classmates. While I hope that these can play a very positive role in your experience, joining these videoconferences is not required to pass the class. You may join the videoconference even if you do not participate in the Glow discussion on a given week, but being part of the videoconference alone will not count toward meeting the participation requirement.

Synthesis Papers
At the end of each week, you will have the opportunity to write a short paper (2 pages, double-spaced). These papers will respond to a specific prompt provided by Prof. Swagler that will ask you to synthesize the major themes and issues covered by the readings from the week. As the class moves along, you will also be asked to reflect on connections to previous readings. There are ten assigned synthesis papers throughout the semester, and each student should hand in five. Four can be completed on weeks of your choosing, due Sundays at 11:59pm to Glow. The fifth response paper, on Homegoing is required for everyone and is due on Wednesday, May 20 at 11:59pm to Glow. In our new format, I would encourage you use the shorter comments you post in the Glow discussions as a starting place for your longer response. Qualitative feedback will be offered and papers will be graded as complete/incomplete.

Primary Source Analysis
During the week of April 27-May 3, you will be asked to analyze a short primary source related to the themes of that week’s readings. There will be multiple primary sources to choose from. The goal is to a) think about what we can learn from the source and b) situate it within the context provided by that week’s readings. These analyses should be two pages, double-spaced. Qualitative feedback will be offered and analyses will be graded as complete/incomplete.

A note on extra credit reports
The previous option to write a report about an Africa-related event on campus or off-campus for extra credit is no longer applicable in this pass/fail context. However, if you already wrote and submitted an extra credit report before spring break, you may count that as one of your synthesis papers. Post-spring break, if opportunities arise to attend online Africa-related events, you may also ‘attend’ and write a two-page, double-spaced report that can count as one of your synthesis papers. You should ask Prof Swagler for approval first. Only one such report may count as a synthesis paper.
COURSE SCHEDULE [Fully updated beginning on page 8]

Fri 2/7    Introductions

Africa at the Start of the Atlantic Slave Trade, c. 1500-1600

Tues 2/11    Belonging and Community in West Africa

- Michigan State University, Exploring Africa curriculum: Module Seven (A) "Early African History, and parts of Module Ten “African Politics.”
- Start Yaa Gyasi, Homegoing.

Friday 2/14  NO CLASS

No synthesis paper due this week
Leaving Africa, c. 1500-1850

Tues 2/18   The Atlantic Slave Trade


Fri 2/21   Refusing Slavery, Forging New Communities


_Synthesis paper #1 on Homegoing due to Glow by Sunday Feb 23 at 11:59pm (optional, complete 4 out of 9)_

Tues 2/25   Meeting with Sylvia Kennick Brown at the Williams College Archives

Fri 2/28   Changing the Americas


_Synthesis paper #2 due to Glow by Sunday March 1 at 11:59pm (optional, complete 4 out of 9)
Updated Syllabus April 4

Enslavement in the Era of Abolition, c. 1800-1900

**Tues 3/3**   The Clotilda & African Town, Part I

*Map Quiz in class*


**Fri 3/6**   The Clotilda & African Town, Part II


*Synthesis paper #3 due to Glow by Sunday March 8 at 11:59pm (optional, complete 4 out of 9)*


Back to Africa, c. 1700-1940

Tues 3/10       Back to Africa I: For Whose Benefit? [LAST IN-PERSON CLASS]


EXTENDED SPRING BREAK
Updated Syllabus April 4

[FULLY UPDATED CALENDAR BEGINS HERE]

April 6-12
Back to Africa II: Liberian Lives
(Mid-1800s)


- *People and Power* episode on Liberia and Firestone, Al-Jazeera (2007). *People and Power* is a long-running weekly investigative journalism program. [Part I and Part II, total 12 mins]


*Synthesis paper #4 due to Glow by Sunday April 12 at 11:59pm (optional, complete 4 out of 9)*

April 13-19
Black Salvation: Singers, Boxers, Missionaries, and Garveyism in South Africa
(Early 1900s)


*Synthesis paper #5 due to Glow by Sunday April 19 at 11:59pm (optional, complete 4 out of 9)*
April 20-26

- Maya Angelou, *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes*, excerpt TBA.

*Synthesis paper #6 due to Glow by Sunday April 26 at 11:59pm (optional, complete 4 out of 9)*

April 27-May 3

- *Have You Heard from Johannesburg* (dir. Connie Field, 2010), Episode 5: “From Selma to Soweto, 1977–1986” (89 minutes). This can be streamed via the Williams College Library.

*Synthesis paper #7 due to Glow by Sunday May 3 at 11:59pm (optional, complete 4 out of 9)*

*Primary Source Analysis due to Glow by Monday May 4 at 11:59pm (required)*
May 4–10
US Interventions in Africa since Independence
(1960-Present)

- Reading on structural adjustment TBA.

*Synthesis paper #8 due to Glow by Sunday May 10 (optional, complete 4 out of 9)*

May 11–17
Black Panther, Afropolitanism, and New Migrations
(1980-Present)


*Synthesis paper #9 on Black Panther due Sunday May 17 (optional, complete 4 out of 9)*

*Final required synthesis paper on Homegoing due Wednesday May 20 (same length/guidelines as other synthesis papers)*

END OF COURSE
**COURSE EXPECTATIONS [Fully updated]**

**Attendance/Participation**
To pass, you will need to participate in (at least) 4 out of the final 6 weeks of the class. Participating now means completing the assigned materials, then posting and responding in the weekly discussion on Glow with the other members of your discussion group. Please post and respond by the weekly deadlines so that you do not hold up your fellow students.

You may also join the optional weekly videoconferences on Fridays with your discussion group. You may join even if you do not participate in the Glow discussion on a given week, but being part of the videoconference alone will not count toward meeting the participation requirement.

When possible, inform me if you don’t plan to participate during a given week. This will help me to better organize the discussion groups that week.

If you cannot participate in four out of the final six weeks, contact me as soon as possible so that we may work out alternative arrangements.

**Videoconference (Zoom) Guidelines:**
If you are able and choose to participate in the Zoom videoconferences, please try to present yourself as you might if you were coming to an in-person meeting:
- Silence and set your phone aside for the duration of the videoconference, just as you would in-person. Turn off your computer notifications as well. Unless it is an emergency, please wait until afterward to respond to texts/calls.
- Sit or stand (rather than laying down)
- More-or-less dress as you would if you were coming to class
- Avoid eating during the call (drinks okay). While I did not have a problem with people eating when we met in person, on a videoconference the sound of crunching a chewing is more distracting than in a classroom setting.

If there are reasons that you are not able to follow these guidelines, just let me know.

**Collaboration**
Feel free to use any/all technology available to you to read, study, and discuss all weekly materials with your fellow students. Your synthesis papers and primary source analysis should be *composed* individually, but you are welcome to discuss ideas together. You are, of course, encouraged to set up online appointments with the Writing Workshop for feedback. (Tutors are still working online!)

**Plagiarism**
The Williams Honor Code applies to all work you do for this course. Given the above guidelines for collaboration, any instance of cheating or plagiarism on a paper is unacceptable. Plagiarism is the failure to give credit to the source of another’s words or ideas, including but not limited to books, articles, interviews, and multimedia and electronic sites. If you have further questions about how the Honor Code applies in this course, please see me.
**Extensions**

You may request an extension from me for a written assignment. Please make your request at least 24 hours before an assignment is due, except in the case of an emergency. Doing so helps me keep track of which papers are coming in when and from whom. If you do not arrange an extension with me, I will not accept written assignments for a ‘complete’ more than three days after the due date (unless you face exceptional circumstances).

**Accessibility**

Students with disabilities of any kind who may need accommodations for this course are still encouraged to contact Dr. GL Wallace, the Director of Accessible Education (glw3@williams.edu, 413-597-4692) to ensure these can be arranged in our new format. Also, students experiencing mental, physical, or emotional strain are encouraged to contact me and to speak with a dean so we can help you find the right resources. The deans are holding virtual office hours and are available to help students with challenges of all kinds. Call them at 413-597-4171 or schedule a meeting at https://dean.williams.edu/office-hours/

I will post a more complete list of accessibility and academic resources with hyperlinks on Glow.