Is Africa Poor?

HIST 307

Professor Matt Swagler

TERM: Spring 2020
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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

Poverty is widespread across Africa, yet exists alongside the continent’s fantastic wealth in natural resources. Despite a decade of excitement about “rising Africa” as a new economic powerhouse, African countries still occupy 33 of the bottom 40 positions in the most recent UN Human Development Report. How can we make sense of this contradiction? In this debate-focused seminar, we will delve deeply into the work of historians, international organizations, and African activists who have argued over the causes of poverty and inequality in Africa—and arrived at different conclusions about the appropriate solutions. Taking a historical approach, we will explore how the current challenges faced by African societies are rooted in the slave trade, colonial rule, the Cold War, and more recently, the imposition of neoliberal economic policies in Africa. Key issues of contemporary debate will include the role of state-centered development, privatization, resource extraction, foreign development aid, and climate change.

Difference, Power, and Equity notes:

The class is grounded in extensive reading and debate about how economic inequality became structured on a global scale. This will entail studying how interconnected economic, political, and social differences developed—both between Africa and the rest of the world and within the African continent. Building on the wide-range of texts that we will analyze, the discussions and assignments will equip students to better understand and respond to current issues of global economic justice.

REQUIRED BOOKS

The following books are required for the course:

  Update: We have now completed our reading of this book, though you may want to refer back to it.

  Update: If you do not have a copy of the book, I have secured a free Ebook and PDF version which I will post on Glow.

  Update: We will now only be reading an excerpt from this book, rather than the entire book. I will scan that excerpt and post it on Glow.

All other readings will now be posted on Glow. Because of our hasty departure from campus, I was not able to order and distribute the new readings packets for the second half of the course before everyone left.
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, running from Tuesday to Monday. 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 three discussion groups.)

You may also join optional 45-minute weekly videoconferences on Monday evenings 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.

Response Papers
Each week, you will have the opportunity to write a short paper (2-3 pages, double-spaced). These papers will respond a specific prompt provided by Prof. Swagler that will ask you to analyze 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. Each student is responsible for submitting four response papers over the course of the semester. They may be completed on weeks of your choosing, due Mondays at 7pm 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. Anyone who completed a debate pre-Spring break may count their debate participation for one of your response papers. Qualitative feedback will be offered and papers will be graded as complete/incomplete.

Topical Group Project (formerly the Group Podcast Projects)
The group projects will remain a requirement for passing, but these projects will no longer culminate in a podcast. Instead, the projects will take a textual or mixed media form on the web (akin to a blog), with both joint and individual submissions; details will be worked out with each group. Qualitative feedback will be offered and projects will be graded as complete/incomplete.

A note on the in-class debates: We will no longer be holding the two remaining in-class debates. If you already put in the work of participating in the first two, your debate notes/participation may now count as one of your response papers.
COURSE SCHEDULE [Fully updated beginning on page 8]

FEB 10 Is Africa Poor? Defining the Question


Additional in-class readings/viewings:
- Visuals from Johnny Miller’s *Unequal Scenes* project, 2018.
- Miles Kimball and Anonymous, “How Big is the Sexism Problem in Economics? This Article’s Co-author is Anonymous Because of It,” *Quartz*, 6 January 2015.

FEB 17 Was there a Great Divergence? Africa in Comparative Global Perspective before 1500

FEB 24  Did Slavery Impoverish Africa?
New Dynamics of Trade and Slavery, c. 1450-1860

Debate #1: The expansion of slavery and the slave trades from 1400-1900 had a detrimental long-term impact on economic development in Africa.

Required for everyone

- Argument against the debate statement: David Northrup, Africa’s Discovery of Europe, 3rd ed. (2013), 54-64, 97-110.

Additional Materials (required for the debaters, non-debaters will be assigned one of the following)

- Data against the debate statement: Morten Jerven, Africa: Why Economists Get It Wrong (2015), 80-86.
- Against the debate statement: Sean Stilwell, Slavery and Slaving in African History (2014), Chapter 1 “Defining Slavery, Defining Freedom” (excerpts) and Chapter 5 “Slavery and African Economies,” 8-12, 14-19, 21-26, 124-175.
MARCH 2 Did Colonialism Underdevelop Africa?  
Colonial Rule in Africa, c. 1830-1994

- Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*
  - Chapter V “Africa’s Contribution to the Capitalist Development of Europe—The Colonial Period,” (all), 175-244.
  - Chapter VI “Colonialism as a System for Underdeveloping Africa,” (partial) 245-319.

Recommended (counterpoints—not in packet, sent out via email and Glow):

*Map quiz in class*
Debate #2: The implementation of state-centered development plans had a negative impact on new African nations in the 1940s-70s.

Debaters should read all 3 overviews below and the case studies as you develop your arguments. Non-debaters should read a) The Wengraf chapter b) Either the Cooper or the Mkandawire overview c) One case study assigned to you.

Overviews

Case Studies

Mozambique

Algeria

Ghana

Zambia

Botswana
- Ian Taylor’s response to Ellen Hillbom

**EXTENDED SPRING BREAK: No class March 16–April 5**
[UPDATED CALENDAR BEGINS HERE – STILL IN PROGRESS]

APRIL 7–13   Did ‘Unleashing’ the Private Sector bring Prosperity or Poverty to Africa?  
Neoliberalism and Structural Adjustment, c. 1980-Present


*Group Research project proposals due Friday, April 10 to Glow by 11:59pm*

*Weekly response paper due Monday, April 13 to Glow by 7:00pm EST (optional, complete 4)*

APRIL 14–20   For Whom is Africa Rising?  
Economic Growth and its Contradictions, c. 2000-Present

- Other readings/films, TBA.

*Group Research Project feedback from Prof Swagler*

*Weekly response paper due Monday, April 20 to Glow by 7:00pm EST (optional, complete 4)*
APRIL 21-27  Foreign Investment or Global Exploitation?  
The New Scramble for Africa’s Resources


*Group Research Project outlines due Friday, April 24 to Glow by 11:59pm*

*Weekly response paper due Monday, April 27 to Glow by 7:00pm EST (optional, complete 4)*

APRIL 28-MAY 4  Is Growth Sustainable in Africa?  
Health and the Environment in the Twenty-first Century

- Film on HIV/AIDS crisis TBA
- Reading on COVID-19 TBA
- Reading/Film on oil extraction in Niger Delta TBA

*Weekly response paper due Monday, May 4 to Glow by 7:00pm EST (optional, complete 4)*
MAY 5-11  Do African Women Need to be Saved—or Are They Africa’s Saviors?
Women in African Economies

- Article/excerpt from Melinda Kan-Dapaah’s research project on women miners in Ghana.

**Group Research Project drafts due Friday, May 1 to Glow by 11:59pm**

**Weekly response paper due Monday, May 4 to Glow by 7:00pm EST (optional, complete 4)**

MAY 12-18  Is Aid Holding Africa Back?
The Politics of Foreign Aid


Optional case studies:

**Weekly response paper due Monday, May 18 to Glow by 7:00pm EST (optional, complete 4)**

**Final Group Research Projects to go public online & Reports due Friday, May 22 by 11:59pm to Glow.**

**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 topical group project should be as collaborative as possible given your group’s circumstances. Your response papers should be composed individually, but you are welcome to discuss ideas together prior to writing. You are also encouraged to set up online appointments with the Writing Workshop for feedback on your drafts. (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.