

**HIS 715:  
ATLANTIC WORLD SPECIAL TOPICS  
AFRICA IN ATLANTIC HISTORY**

Spring 2011  
Wednesdays 3:30-6:20, 3209 MHRA

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Office Hours: I will be holding office hours on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from  
9:30 to 10:30 AM, and by appointment.

**Course Objectives:** To paraphrase Ralph Ellison, “America is unimaginable without Africa.” We now know that about four times as many Africans as Europeans left Afroeurasia for the Americas before 1800. Despite the importance of Africa to the history of the Americas and Europe, it is still unusual to find African history taught in secondary schools and in universities. This course is designed to introduce graduate students to the roles and place of Africa and Africans in the inter-continental history of the Atlantic basin. It adopts a wide geographical lens and a *longue durée* view over time. The two main topics we will cover are: Africa and Africans in the Atlantic Slave Trade; and Africa and European Colonial Rule in Modern History.

A major goal of the course is to change our minds about Africa – unlearning what our distorted media have drummed into us about Africa and replacing that with historical knowledge about events and individuals in African history. We will be examining and discussing *why* there have been such distortions. ‘Race’ is certainly a central issue, but so, too, are the traumas of slavery in American history and the traumas of European colonial conquests and administrations in 20<sup>th</sup> century Africa. Just as slavery has been called “America’s skeleton in the closet,” colonization of Africa is a “skeleton in the closet” in modern European history. We will therefore be engaging in *epistemology* – the study of knowledge and where it comes from – which entails both critical thinking about historiography and thoughtful self-analysis and reflection.

**Learning Outcomes:**

by the end of this course students should have developed significant skill in:

- § analyzing and summarizing historical monographs about African history;
- § synthesizing primary and secondary sources from African history;
- § identifying and assessing gaps and biases in historical literature.

**Requirements and Grading:**

Each student will give a formal presentation to the class on one of the books listed in the syllabus calendar, and will guide the discussion of the topic for that day’s meeting (worth 30 % of final course grade); on the other days, each student will bring in a one-page position paper on the primary source readings or collective course readings, and will bring copies for the other students (worth 30 % of final course grade); each student will write two formal reflective essays of 6-8 pages (each worth 20%, total 40% of final course grade).

**Readings:** Required books and articles on e-reserve are listed in the course calendar below.