African History: Precolonial Times to 1800

HIST 261-001, Fall 2022

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12-1:15

Dr. Jane Hooper

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Questions?

* Send Dr. Hooper an email at jhooper3@gmu.edu - I will try to respond within 24 hours during the week (it will take me more time on weekends).
* Send an email and request a private zoom meeting.
* Set up an in-person meeting (office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10-11 am). Please email in advance.

Resources:

* For help with learning, check out GMU Learning Services at this link.
* If you’re struggling with mental health issues, reach out to CAPS – they offer a range of free help for students (including after-hours crisis services). For more resources focused on emotional and mental well-being, click on this link.
* Issues with technology? Check out the resources provided at this link. If you can’t find the answers there, you should reach out to the ITS Support Center for help (their contact information is here).
* Need assistance with writing assignments for this class? Make an appointment to work with a tutor online through the Writing Center (instructions for how to schedule a session are found here).
* If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS (their website is here) and communicated to the professor in a timely manner.
Note about Communications: Students must use their Mason email account to receive important University information. I encourage you to inform me of how you wish to be addressed by name and by pronouns before the start of class so I may properly address you in class and via email. I use she/her/hers as my pronouns. You may address me as Dr. Hooper.

Course Description:
From the creation of a new nation state in South Sudan to the continuation of warfare in the eastern Congo, it can appear as if contemporary Africa is home to constant political and social upheaval. In this survey of African history, students will examine the historical background to debates such as those over African identity and underdevelopment that continue to shape our perceptions of the continent today. This course is designed to introduce students to the social, political, economic, and cultural history of sub-Saharan Africa from the earliest times into the nineteenth century. Students will gain an overview of some of the most significant developments of the African past, including early state building, the growing influence of Islam and Christianity, and the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Africa will be presented as continent at the crossroads of global interactions, at the center for struggles over identity, and the home of breathtaking works of art, spirited communities, and incredible natural wonders.

To accomplish these aims, we will also study how historians and other scholars approach this history. We will examine how we can use archeological evidence, oral traditions, and written documents to understand historical developments on the continent. Written assignments will focus on helping us make sense of these diverse sources. On Tuesdays, the professor will provide an historical overview in a mixture of lecture and discussion format and, on Thursdays, students will be expected to share their reactions to the week’s readings. By the end of the semester, students will be able to describe the major events and influences that shaped the early history of Africa and link these developments to challenges that face modern Africa.

Course Objectives:
1. Students will gain a better understanding of the history and culture of Africa.
2. To note how aspects of African societies – including identity, religion, gender relations, and state formations – changed over time.
3. Students will learn how to analyze and think critically about a variety of sources – including oral histories, archeological data, and written sources – to make sense of the history of Africa.
4. Students will gain an appreciation of the diversity of African communities and experiences from an African perspective.

**Commitment to an inclusive, antiracist learning environment:**

Public higher education in the United States – and George Mason University, specifically – ideally exists to foster a more free, just, and democratic society. Racism – systemic and otherwise – is among the most pernicious barriers to the realization of that mission. George Mason and this instructor are all committed to confronting the realities of race and racism head on; we are committed to establishing learning environments that are welcoming, inclusive, and equitable; and we are committed to breaking down the barriers to freedom, justice, and democracy posed by racism. This is challenging work, and I acknowledge that at times, we – and I – will fall short. If you feel that our learning environment does not meet these standards, please do not hesitate to tell me. I am committed to listening, to hearing you, and to working together to create an inclusive, antiracist learning environment.

**Engaging with Hard History:**

At times, this course will take many of us (including the instructor) into areas of inquiry, historical and current, that will be challenging and unsettling. We may be anxious and uncertain as to how to engage when faced with some of these topics, but these responses should be taken as evidence of the importance of our confrontation with them. In all of our interactions, you must commit to participating in our conversations with respect, tolerance, curiosity, and forthrightness. You must be willing to contribute to the conversation, to give others space to offer their views, and to listen generously and carefully. While you will certainly disagree with me and with one another at times, we expect and, in fact, demand that you interact as colleagues and treat each other with mutual respect and tolerance.
Conduct that does not comply will not be acceptable. If, at any point, you feel that our learning environment falls short of these standards of mutual respect and tolerance – or I have fallen short of this standard – please do not hesitate to tell me.

Acknowledgement Statements:

Land Acknowledgement

A land acknowledgment engages all present in an ongoing indigenous protocol to enact meaningful, reciprocal relationships with ancestors and contemporary tribal nations. As a state university, we have a responsibility to include and support indigenous communities and sovereign tribes in our work.

At the place George Mason University occupies, we give greetings and thanksgivings:

- to these Potomac River life sources,
- to the Doeg ancestors, who Virginia annihilated in violent campaigns while ripping their lands
- apart with the brutal system of African American enslavement,
- to the recognized Virginia tribes who have lovingly stewarded these lands for millennia
- including the Rappahannock, Pamunkey, Upper Mattaponi, Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Nansemond, Monacan, Mattaponi, Patawomeck, and Nottaway, past, present,
- and future, and
- to the Piscataway tribes, who have lived on both sides of the river from time immemorial.

Acknowledging the History of Enslavement on GMU Lands

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1 Dr. Gabrielle Tayac, Department of History and Art History. See also https://legacies.gmu.edu/about/landacknowledgement-statement.
2 Dr. Sheri Ann Huerta, Department of History and Art History, Honors College. Research provided by Dr. Benedict Carton, Center for Mason Legacies, https://silverbox.gmu.edu/legacy/s/blnd/page/pasts-next-door.
We acknowledge the enslaved persons who were forced to labor for more than 200 years on the lands that are now home to George Mason University. Most of these men, women, and children will never be known to us due to the racist policies that tried to strip away their humanity. We honor Linah Thornton, Surah, Siriah, Lego, Anna, Lewis, Louisa, and Cato and the many unknown, but not forgotten, enslaved laborers who left their imprints on this land and place.

**Grading and expectations:**

*Participation:* This class is participatory and, in order to get the most from class, you need to attend every class prepared and having thought about the assigned reading(s). Please note that being present does not simply mean that one makes it to our face-to-face class meetings; it means engaging with the course – the texts, the assignments, and with the other members of our classroom community – in ways that raises questions about the content, adds to the content, interprets the content in multiple viewpoints, and makes connections to the content.

The standard participation grade for students who occasionally participate thoughtfully in class and during groupwork will be an 80%. Students who are more active participants will receive a higher grade and those who refuse to work in small groups will be given a lower grade. If you have poor class participation due to absences – i.e., your non-presence during classes – your final grade will be a zero. If you are absent for more than four classes (and do not provide an adequate excuse in a timely manner – i.e., notify the instructor after your second missed class), you will lose points from your class participation grade.

*Discussion Leading:* During the semester, you will be introducing our discussion once with two other students. You will be responsible for spending between ten and fifteen minutes at the beginning of class introducing major themes and issues for discussion for the class through whatever media you find appropriate (the material must be related to the class, please see the instructor if you have questions about the quality of what you have found). You will also provide the class with at least two discussion questions to start our discussion. You will be individually graded on the quality of your presentation. A grading rubric is posted on blackboard.
**Reaction Papers:** You will complete short assignments that will assist you in understanding the course material. Papers are to be submitted through the course blackboard site **before midnight on the Wednesday prior to class.** You will receive a score of 1 (adequately addressed the assigned question) or 0 (did not fulfill the assignment) for each paper. You must provide proper footnote citations for each paper. Out of 10 weekly papers listed on the syllabus, you will be graded on 8 of these papers. Late weekly papers will not be accepted for any reason.

**Map Activity:** On September 1, you will bring a completed map with you to class to be turned into the instructor. Instructions for this assignment can be found on blackboard. This assignment will be graded on a pass (completed the entire assignment) or fail (did not complete all the required elements) basis. If you are not in class, you must submit this assignment via email by scanning the map.

**Short Papers:** You will write **two short papers** throughout the semester. These papers will be 3-5 pages in length and focus on the two books we are reading this semester. Separate guides for these assignments will be distributed later in the semester, as well as a grading rubric.

**Mid-term and Final:** These in-class exams will be comprehensive and deal with our readings, assignments, and discussions in class. The exams will test your ability to analyze historical data and not just focus on the memorization of dates and events, although you will be tested on this information as well. Guides will be distributed in advance of the exams. The exams will both be open note, but you may not use computers, phones, photocopied notes, or books on this exam. You can only use your own notes, whether handwritten or typewritten (printed). Violation of this policy will result in a zero for the exam and referral to the Office for Academic Integrity. **Note the dates for the mid-term and final in your calendar now,** to ensure you can be present those days.

**Exam Rules and Deadlines:** In accordance with university regulations, professors in the Department of History and Art History re-schedule exams after receiving documentation of a medical emergency or family emergency; often this documentation must be verified by the Dean of Student Life. **Work-related or personal/family obligations are not adequate excuses for**
re-scheduling an exam or obtaining any kind of extension. Note: September 6 is the last day to drop classes with no tuition penalty; September 27 is the final day for selective withdrawal (100% tuition liability). If you have questions about registering for this class, please speak with your academic advisor.

**Final Grade:**
- Participation - 15% (based on the quantity and quality of your contributions)
- Discussion leading – 5%
- Reaction Papers (8 total) - 15%
- Map Activity – 5%
- Short papers (2 total) - 20%
- Mid-term - 20%
- Final - 30%

**Final grades will be determined using the following ranges:**
- 91.8-100 A
- 90-91.7 A-
- 88.3-89.9 B+
- 81.8-88.2 B
- 80-81.7 B-
- 78.3-79.9 C+
- 71.8-78.2 C
- 70-71.7 C-
- 60-69.9 D
- 59.9 and below F

**Office of Disability Services:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. See [http://ods.gmu.edu](http://ods.gmu.edu).
Note about Communications: Students must use their Mason email account to receive important University information. Blackboard will be used to post important messages, links for readings, and grades for papers.

Other Important Campus Resources:
The Writing Center: Robinson A114, http://writingcenter.gmu.edu
University Libraries: http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. Writers give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books, articles, and websites is not sufficient. **Plagiarism cannot be tolerated in an academic setting.**

Student writers are often confused as to what should be cited. Some think that only direct quotations need to be credited; this is incorrect. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions to this rule include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of sources—what has been called common knowledge—or the writers' own insights or findings from their own field research. What constitutes common knowledge can sometimes be precarious; what is common knowledge for one audience may be so for another. In such situations, it is helpful to keep the reader in mind and to think of citations as being "reader friendly."

In other words, **writers provide a citation for any piece of information that they think their readers might be unfamiliar with and want to investigate or debate further.** Not only is this attitude considerate of readers, it will almost certainly ensure that writers will not be guilty of plagiarism.
Cheating means to get help on an assignment without permission. This includes asking another classmate to “see” their paper before writing your own paper OR hiring someone to “edit” your paper. Allowing another student to see your work without permission from the instructor is also considered cheating. You must get permission from your instructor before asking anyone outside of your professors, writing center tutors, or teaching assistants for help on assignments. If you don’t understand an assignment, you need to ask the professor for clarification rather than your classmates.

In this course, you will be expected to adhere to the Honor Code at George Mason. It is your responsibility to read and understand the policy (available at http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/). We will discuss the use of citations and quotations throughout the semester. If you have any questions on how to cite a source, please see the professor or instructor.

Texts Available for Purchase through the Bookstore:


Alternate unabridged editions are acceptable. All other readings on the syllabus are found in links given on blackboard or on course reserves. You are expected to bring a copy of assigned readings with you to class.
Course Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change. Please consult the course blackboard site for updated course information.

Introductions: Different Understandings of the African Past

**Tuesday, August 23:** Introduction to the course and expectations

**Thursday, August 25:** Defining Africa, spatially and temporally

*Readings:*

*In class:*

*Reaction paper #1 due August 24 by midnight*

*Choose day for introducing discussion*

*Introduce map assignment*

**Tuesday, August 30:** Overview of African history

*Reading:*

**Thursday, September 1:** Map activity

*Readings:*

*Reaction paper #2 due August 31 by midnight*

*Map due in class*

States, Religion, and Trade, before 1300 CE

**Tuesday, September 6:** Early history of northern and northeastern Africa

*Reading:*
  - Harms, *Africa in Global History*, chapter 2

*In class:*
  - Herodotus, “The Histories” (available on blackboard)
Thursday, September 8: Other perspectives on the early past
   
   Readings:
   - Harms, *Africa in Global History*, chapter 2: Perspectives

   Reaction paper #3 due September 7 by midnight

Tuesday, September 13: State development and Islam in northwestern and western Africa
   
   Reading:
   - Harms, *Africa in Global History*, chapter 3 and Perspectives

Thursday, September 15: The empire of Mali
   
   Reading:
   - Ibn Battuta, *Travels* (excerpts) (document posted on blackboard)

   Reaction paper #4 due September 14 by midnight

Tuesday, September 20: Cities of West Africa
   
   Reading:
   - Harms, *Africa in Global History*, chapter 4 (pp. 124-147)
   
   In class:
   - Archeology of West Africa: Jenne-Jeno (available on blackboard)

Thursday, September 22: Engaging with oral histories, discussion of Sundiata
   
   Reading:
   - Sundiata.
   
   In class:
   - Jan Jansen, “Beyond the Mali Empire: a New Paradigm for the Sunjata Epic” (available on blackboard)

   Paper 1 due September 25 by midnight

Tuesday, September 27: East Africa before 1600
   
   Reading:
   - Harms, *Africa in Global History*, chapter 4 (pp. 147-157)
   
   In class:
   - East Africa primary sources (available on blackboard)

Thursday, September 29 – no class: The Great Zimbabwe and East Africa
   
   At home:
   - Watch video from *Africa’s Great Civilizations* (see link on blackboard)
Reaction paper #5 due October 2 by midnight

Tuesday, October 4: States and trade in southern Africa
   * No reading, review for mid-term exam

Thursday, October 6: Midterm exam in class

Tuesday, October 11 – Fall break (Monday classes meet)

   **European Intruders**

Thursday, October 13: Europeans on the West African coast
   
   **Reading:**

   **In class:**
   - James Walvin, “Crossings” (available on blackboard)

   **Reaction paper #6 due October 12 by midnight**

Tuesday, October 18: An overview of the trans-Atlantic slave trade

   **Reading:**
   - Harms, *Africa in Global History*, chapter 5

Thursday, October 20: Researching the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade
   
   **At home:**
   - Complete worksheet on slavevoyages.org (posted on blackboard) and submit via blackboard *before class*

   **Reaction paper #7 due October 19 by midnight**

Tuesday, October 25: Atlantic Africa

   **Reading:**
   - Harms, *Africa in Global History*, chapter 6 and Perspectives

Thursday, October 27: West African enslavement from the eyes of Equiano

   **Reading:**
   - Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1790) (document found on blackboard)

   **Reaction paper #8 due by midnight**

Tuesday, November 1: East Africa and conflicting imperialisms

   **Reading:**
   - Harms, *Africa in Global History*, chapter 7 and Perspectives
Thursday, November 3: Stories of East African enslavement
   Reading:
      - Strategies of Slaves & Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa, edited by Marcia Wright (London: James Currey, 1993), 1-9, 91-121 (available through the library catalog)

Reaction paper #9 due November 2 by midnight

Political Upheavals

Tuesday, November 8:
   Reading:
      - Harms, Africa in Global History, Part 3 (pp. 828-287)

Thursday, November 10:
   Reading:
      - Harms, Africa in Global History, chapter 8 and Perspectives

Reaction paper #10 due November 9 by midnight

Tuesday, November 15: Nineteenth-century conflicts
   Reading:
      - Harms, Africa in Global History, chapter 9 and Perspectives

Thursday, November 17 – no class (out of town)

Tuesday, November 22: Conflicting interpretations of Shaka Zulu
   Reading:
      - Mofolo, Chaka.

Paper 2 due November 27 by midnight

Thursday, November 24 – Thanksgiving (no class)

Tuesday, November 29: Looking beyond 1800
   Reading:
      - Harms, Africa in Global History, Part 4 (372-378)

Thursday, December 1: Review and final reflections

Final Exam: Thursday, December 8, 10:30 am – 1:15 pm