

Witchcraft & Healing in Africa

HIST 4385
MW 11:00 – 12:15
Pafford 208

Instructor: Dr. McCullers
Office Hours: MW 1 – 4 or by appointment
Office: TLC 3225
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Course Description:

This course explores questions of belief, the supernatural, and wellbeing in African cosmologies throughout history. This class takes a historiographical approach to these topics in order to introduce students to another facet of “doing history” and to prepare them for senior seminar. Throughout the semester, we will examine how scholarly approaches to understanding African cosmologies have changed and developed over time. Therefore, our readings, rather than the course content, will be in chronological order. Prior knowledge of African history is helpful but in no way required.

Learning Outcomes:

Students who successfully complete this course will improve their skills in writing, critical thinking, and understanding of African societies and cultures. They will also develop an awareness of the complexity of beliefs surrounding religion, the supernatural, misfortune, and health. This course is designed to provide actively engaged students with the following abilities:

- To analyze historiographical arguments and to pose significant historical questions
- To locate and cite useful and appropriate secondary sources
- To construct a persuasive and critical historical evidence-based argument
- To communicate clearly and effectively in grammatically correct and polished English

Readings:

The following books are required for this course. All books, except *In Sorcery's Shadow*, are available on reserve at the circulation desk at the library. You may check reserve books out for 3 hours at a time. Copies to purchase are available at the bookstore and online at Amazon.com. If you would prefer not to purchase books, you may obtain library copies through GIL-Express and Interlibrary Loan (see course resources section on Course Den page).

- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (abridged version)

- Paul Stoller & Cheryl Olkes, *In Sorcery's Shadow*
- Jean & John Comaroff, *Modernity & Its Malcontents: Ritual & Power in Postcolonial Africa*
- Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*
- Karen Flint, *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820 – 1948*
- Adam Ashforth, *Madumo: A Man Bewitched*

Evaluation & Grading:

Written work is graded on clarity of ideas, quality of writing (including grammar), and analysis. Detailed guidelines for written assignments are on Course Den.

Participation means real and prepared participation in class discussions. This course will be run as a seminar. You are expected to complete the assigned reading before class and to make meaningful contributions to class discussions. Participation is not the same as attendance. If you come to class but are clearly not engaged, you will not receive credit for participation.

Grade Distribution:

- Class Participation – 20%
- Book Review – 10%
- Annotated Bibliography & Abstract – 10%
- Comparative Book Review – 10%
- Revised Comparative Book Review – 5%
- Introduction & Detailed Outline – 10%
- Revised Introduction – 5%
- Final Paper – 20%
- Presentation – 5%
- Peer Review – 5%

Policies:

- Email – You are responsible for checking your email. I will primarily communicate to the class via course den, so make sure you check your course den email regularly. Please only email me in course den.
- Grades and email – I legally cannot discuss your grades via email. If you have questions about your grades, talk to me in person.
- Accommodations – If you need accommodations, it is your responsibility to provide me with paperwork from the Office of Accessibility Services. I cannot provide accommodations otherwise.

- Attendance & Participation – I do not take attendance. However, you are expected to be in class on time regularly and to be prepared and engaged. You cannot participate if you are not in class.
- Phone & Computer use – Please keep your phone on silent or vibrate. You may use your computer to take notes. Use of your phone or computer that interferes with your participation in class or is distracting or disruptive to myself or other students will not be tolerated and you will be asked to desist.
- You are responsible for all class material. If you miss class, you need to get the notes from a classmate. I do not give out notes.
- Late work will be penalized 1/3 letter grade per day.
- Academic Dishonesty – I do not tolerate any form of cheating, plagiarism, or academic dishonesty. I expect all work for this class to be original to you – your words, your ideas, your work. Academic dishonesty will automatically result in a failing grade for the course and I will recommend that the university take action as well.
- University Policies – for a complete list of university policies, please see the following information: http://www.westga.edu/assets/Dept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf

Assignments & Due Dates:

All written work should be submitted via the drop box on course den by 10:30 am and a hard copy handed in in class. Make sure your work is stapled. Specific instructions for each assignment can be found on course den.

Book review:

- Review of Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic*
- Due Monday Jan. 30

Annotated Bibliography & Abstract:

- Should be a combination of at least 1 monograph and 3 scholarly articles, or an equivalent combination thereof (i.e. 2 monographs and 2 articles)
- Due Monday Feb. 13

Comparative Book review:

- Should review and compare 2 chapters of your choice in *Modernity and Its Malcontents*
- Due Monday Feb. 27

Revised comparative book review:

- Revise comparative book review based on my comments & those of peer review group
- Due Monday March 13

Introduction & detailed outline:

- 1-2 pages of introduction to historiographical paper and a detailed outline of the rest
- Due Monday April 3

Revised introduction:

- Revise introduction based on my comments and peer review group
- Due Monday April 17

Final paper:

- Complete and polished final historiographical paper
- Due Wednesday April 26

Presentation:

- 5-minute oral presentation about your topic
- Monday April 24 and Wednesday April 26

Schedule:

Mon. Jan. 9 – Intro to class, Witchcraft, Healing, Historiography

Weds. Jan. 11 – Learning to Read & Not shutting down when you hear the H-Word

- Read “Introduction” & chapters 1 -3 of Witchcraft, Oracles, & Magic

Mon. Jan. 16 – MLK

Unit 1 – Evans-Pritchard

Weds. Jan. 18 – What is Witchcraft?

- Read chs. 4-7 of Witchcraft, Oracles, & Magic

Mon. Jan. 23 - Oracles

- Read chs. 8-10 of Witchcraft, Oracles, & Magic

Weds. Jan. 25 - Magic

- Chs. 11 - Appendices

Mon. Jan. 30 – Thinking about the nature of power, healing, & misfortune

- Begin In Sorcery's Shadow – Prologue & front-matter, chs. 1-10

Unit 2 – Paul Stoller

Weds. Feb. 1 – Comparing Evans-Pritchard & Paul Stoller

- Read chs. 11-21

Mon. Feb. 6 – Revisiting Belief and Social Reality

- Read chs. 22-31

Weds. Feb. 8 - The Dangers of Power

- Read chs. 32-Epilogue

Mon. Feb. 13 – Reconciling Cultures of Thought

- Read Introduction to Modernity & its Malcontents

Unit 3 – The Comaroffs

Weds. Feb. 15 – Witchcraft, Healing, & Historiography thru the 1980s

- Read chs. 1 & 2 of Modernity & its Malcontents

Mon. Feb. 20 – Witchcraft & Healing in the Postmodernist/Postcolonial Turn

- Read chs. 3-5 of Modernity & its Malcontents

Weds. Feb. 22 – History & Anthropology, Historical Anthropology

- Read chs. 6-8 of Modernity & its Malcontents

Mon. Feb. 27 – The Supernatural & Pop-Culture

- Read Preface & ch. 1 of The Modernity of Witchcraft

Unit 4 – Peter Geschiere

Weds. Mar. 1 – Metaphors & Modernity

- Read chs. 2 -3 in The Modernity of Witchcraft

Mon. Mar. 6 – Changing Inflections of Belief

- Read ch. 4 & Comparative Interstice 2 in The Modernity of Witchcraft

Weds. Mar. 8 – The Stakes of Power

- Read chs. 5 & 6 in *The Modernity of Witchcraft*

Mon. Mar. 13 – State & Civil Society

- Read ch. 7 & Afterword in *The Modernity of Witchcraft*

Weds. Mar. 15 – Reflecting on Witchcraft in the Modern World

- Read Preface & Introduction to *Healing Traditions*

March 20-24 – Spring Break

Unit 5 - Karen Flint

Mon. Mar. 27 – Healing Historiography

- Read chs. 1 & 2 of *Healing Traditions*

Weds. Mar. 29 – Historical Healing & Society

- Read chs. 3 & 4 of *Healing Traditions*

Mon. Apr. 3 – Colonialism & Healing

- Read ch. 5 & Epilogue

Weds. Apr. 5 – The Past in the Present

- Read “A Note to the Reader” & chs. 1-4 in *Madumo*

Unit 6 – Adam Ashforth

Mon. Apr. 10 – Understanding Misfortune

- Read chs. 5-9 of *Madumo*

Weds. Apr. 12 – Contemporary Witches & Healers

- Read chs. 10-14 of *Madumo*

Mon. Apr. 17 - Syncretism

- Read chs. 15-20 of *Madumo*

Weds. Apr. 19 – The Power of the Ancestors

Presentations - Mon. Apr. 24 / Weds. Apr. 26