

# Anthropological Perspectives on Africa

## ANTH 327

### Fall 2009

#### Syllabus and Course Policy Statement

**Instructor:** Dr. Stephen Wooten

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Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1-2 pm, or by appointment

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**Course Description:** This course has two main objectives: 1) to introduce you to the contours of life as experienced by the diverse peoples of Africa and 2) to help you develop a critical historical perspective on the anthropology of Africa. By examining a series of key concepts and debates involved in the anthropological study of the continent, you will gain an increased appreciation for and understanding of socio-cultural unity as well as diversity in the African context. In addition, you will develop an awareness of the impact Africa based field studies have had on the discipline of anthropology. In terms of format, we will take a thematic approach: addressing such realms as kinship & social organization, politics & ethnicity, economics, modes of thought, religion and art & aesthetics. As a complement to the course's thematic and comparative focus, you will also gain a detailed understanding of the complexity of life in a specific socio-cultural setting by reading an award-winning contemporary ethnographic narrative. The objective here is for you to see how members of a given society engage/negotiate some of the general themes you learn about in the course. Through lectures, close reading of the assigned materials, classroom discussion and various writing assignments, you will enhance your knowledge of both Africa and anthropology.

#### **Specific Goals of the Course:**

- To gain insight into the lives and experiences of the diverse peoples of sub-Saharan Africa; To develop a critical historical perspective on the anthropology of sub-Saharan Africa; To enhance writing and speaking skills, including the ability to compose critical responses to readings and to participate in thoughtful classroom discussions.

**Class Schedule and Format:** Class sessions will include lecture material but will also center on close analysis and discussion of the issues and concepts raised in the assigned readings. Thus, you are expected to complete the appropriate readings in advance of each class meeting and to play an active and engaged role in each class session. From time to time I will start class with a pop quiz on the readings in order to reward you for your efforts to stay engaged and up to date.

**Readings:** There are two required texts for this course. The core text is Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation, Roy Grinker and Christopher Steiner, editors. This volume presents classic articles in anthropology and African studies, as well as more recent influential contributions. It provides both ethnographic and theoretical material. The second text is Parallel Worlds: An Anthropologist and a Writer Encounter Africa, by Alma Gottlieb and Philip Graham. This work is an example of a newer style of ethnographic writing in which the anthropologist and her spouse

(a novelist) are clearly visible in the research, as well as the narrative. Both texts are available for purchase at the UO Bookstore.

**Requirements:**

1) *Take-Home Essay Exams*

You will have two take-home essay exams during the course. For these assignments, I will provide a series of focus questions on topics or themes addressed in lectures, discussion, readings and/or video presentations. Using knowledge and information gleaned from your readings and our class discussion, you will prepare a 3 page response for each assignment. Please note the dates for these exams in the schedule below and mark them on your calendars now.

2) *Reading Notes and Final*

Both of these components revolve around the second text: Parallel Worlds.

- Throughout the course your reading assignments will include sections of this ethnographic narrative. As you progress through the book, you should take notes on what you encounter. In this exercise you will record your thoughts about the Beng lifeways depicted in the narrative, as well as your reflections on the nature of the interactions between the authors and the people they live among. Your notes will not be graded or evaluated. They are simply meant to help you process the material you read and to remember the thoughts you have while reading. However, if you do a good job with your notes, it is very likely that you will do a good job on the final.
- The final will require that you integrate general themes covered in lectures, readings and discussions with specific ethnographic material presented in Parallel Worlds. As with the previous essays, I will assign a series of focus questions for this exam. To do well on this exam you will need to draw on the knowledge and insights you gained during the course and integrate insights from Parallel Worlds.

3) *Attendance and Participation*

In order to engage each day's material thoroughly you must be current on your reading and be present in class. As noted above, to encourage your engagement and reward you for your dedication, I will give pop quizzes from time to time. Also, as mentioned above, I view this course as a joint venture. Thus, I expect you to contribute to our discussions on a regular basis. Your comments need not be extensive – but they need to be relevant and informed. [Tip: By creating “reading notes” on an ongoing basis, you will always have something to work from in our discussions.]

**Grading:** The following percentages will apply to each component of the course:

Essay Exams (2)	60%
Final	30%
Attendance/Participation	10% (includes pop quizzes)

Final grades will be assigned using a straight scale: 100-90 = A, 80-89 = B, etc. Plus and minus distinctions will be made.

**Assignment Policies:** Late assignments will not be accepted except in the case of a severe illness, injury, or family emergency. If you should run into one of these exceptional situations, you are required to notify me by email or in person BEFORE THE DUE DATE FOR THE ASSIGNMENT. We will discuss your situation and any possible accommodations that might be warranted. To approve alternative arrangements, you will need to provide a letter from a staff member at the Office of Academic Advising documenting your situation. Academic Advising is located 364 Oregon Hall.

**Cheating and Academic Dishonesty:** All assignments in this class are designed to assess your individual knowledge and understanding of the material covered/presented in the course. Thus, cheating

or plagiarism -- in any form -- will not be tolerated. The work you present must be entirely your own. All individuals involved in an act of academic dishonesty will fail the course. I do not expect to encounter any problems in this area, but feel you should be forewarned.

**Discrimination:** The University of Oregon is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity institution. Discrimination on the basis of any of the categories covered in the University's anti-discrimination policy will not be tolerated in this class. If you have a concern in this regard, please contact the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity at 346-3123 or visit them at 474 Oregon Hall.

**Physical or Learning Disabilities:** If you have a condition that inhibits learning or evaluation under customary circumstances, please let me know. In addition, please request a letter from Disability Services that verifies your disability and states the accommodations that I can make. I will make any reasonable adjustments necessary to improve your learning environment.

## Class Calendar

(This schedule is subject to change. Please be sure to keep posted on updates.)

### **Week One**

#### **Africa Through the Anthropological Lens**

Tuesday, 9/29: Syllabus and Personal Introduction

Thursday, 10/1: Perspectives on Africa  
Reading: Grinker and Steiner (G/S) pp.: x-xiii, xvii-xxxi.

### **Week Two**

#### **Kinship, Politics and "Tribal" Society**

Tuesday, 10/6: Descent and The Lineage  
Reading: G/S pp. 2-10, 11-23, 24-37.

Thursday, 10/8: The "Tribe"  
Reading: G/S pp. 38-51.

Also, this week begin reading Parallel Worlds.

### **Week Three**

#### **Ethnicity and The Nation State**

Tuesday, 10/13: Nationalism/Modernity and Ethnicity  
Reading: G/S pp. 52-68, 69-85

Thursday, 10/15: Identity Politics  
Reading: G/S pp. 625-626, 629-636, 637-652.

Continue Parallel Worlds.

### **Week Four**

#### **Sex and Gender**

Tuesday, 10/20: Autonomy and Power/Sex and Sexuality  
Reading: G/S pp. 536-549, 550-566.

Thursday, 10/22: Gender Issues in Africa/Roles and Reversals

Reading: G/S pp. 498-505, 518-535.

Continue Parallel Worlds.

**\* Exam 1 handed out at end of class \***

**Week Five**

Culture and Economy

Tuesday, 10/27: “Bitter Money” and “The Cattle of Money”  
Reading: G/S pp. 163-189, 190-209.

**\* Exam 1 due at start of class \***

Thursday, 10/29: “The Art of Livelihood”  
Reading: PDF of selections from my recent book

Continue Parallel Worlds.

**Week Six**

Modes of Thought

Tuesday, 11/3: A Focus on Zande Beliefs  
Reading: G/S pp. 294-298, 299-302.

Thursday, 11/5: Video on Zande Witchcraft  
Reading: G/S pp. 303-311, 312-326.

Continue Parallel Worlds.

**Week Seven**

Religion and Ritual

Tuesday, 11/10 (In)Consistent Cosmologies  
Reading: G/S pp. 360-365, 366-378, 379-391.

Thursday, 11/12: Video on religion in Africa  
Africa’s Triple Religious Heritage  
Reading: G/S pp. 392-411, 412-421.

Continue Parallel Worlds.

**Week Eight**

Art and Aesthetics

Tuesday, 11/17: The Power of Expressive Culture  
Reading: G/S pp. 424-432, 433-449.

Thursday, 11/19: Mande Agri/Culture  
Reading: PDF of selections from my recent book

**\* Exam 2 handed out at end of class \***

**Week Nine**

Tuesday, 11/24: Catch-up Day

**\* Exam 2 due at beginning of class \***

Thursday, 11/26: Thanksgiving – NO CLASS

### **Week Ten**

Anthropology and Africa: Encounters and Exchanges

Tuesday, 12/1 Issues of Representation and A New Ethnographic Approach  
Reading: G/S pp. 704-723, 728-731.

**\* Homework due to Professor Wooten via email by 12:01 AM on Wednesday, 12/2 \***

Thursday, 12/3 Class Discussion on Parallel Worlds

Complete Parallel Worlds

### **Final Exam**

**\* 8 AM on Tuesday, December 8<sup>th</sup> \***