AAAS 120a
AFRICAN HISTORY IN REAL TIME

Instructor Information
Prof. Carina Ray
Mandel 207
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Office Hours: T/TH 12:30-1:45

Course Location and Meeting Time
T/Th @ 2:00-3:20
Pearlman Hall 202

Course Description
Media representations and news stories about Africa often project a troubling ahistorical narrative about a continent in peril. This information literacy-driven course will teach you how to place current events in Africa in their historical context. It will also teach you to discern what constitutes a valid news source and how to find sources you can trust. We’ll develop the skills necessary to make sense out of a news landscape that presents conflicting accounts of the same story and that fails to cover some stories altogether. You’ll leave this course with a command over how to find news, how to read news, and then how to make sense of it through rigorous historical analysis. To that end, you’ll learn how to locate and evaluate scholarly sources with the same rigor as you do news sources.

The first four weeks of this course will focus on three things. First, you’ll be provided with a broad overview of the narrative arc of Africa’s history so that even if you have no prior knowledge of African history you will be familiar with the key events and themes in the continent’s history. Second, you will be introduced to the long history of problematic media portrayals of Africa and efforts to both critique and change these representations. Third, we will work intensively with librarian, Laura Hibbler, to master a set of basic information literacy skills at the start of the semester that we will grow and refine as the class progresses.

The remainder of the class syllabus will be determined by the current news cycle which will generate topics to be considered for further historical analysis. Collectively we will constantly monitor the news for stories we feel deserve our focused attention. This aspect of the class is perhaps the most crucial place where we will put our information literacy skills to work as we wade through a plethora of news stories from African, European, American, and international media outlets to decide on key stories that will become distinct course “modules” of their own. We will spend roughly two weeks on each module, during which we will consult a broad range of primary and secondary source materials that allow us to place the current event in its historical context. As such the only set part of this course’s syllabus is the first four weeks. The rest of the syllabus will be designed through a class-wide collaborative process.
Learning Goals
* Familiarize you with the long history of problematic media portrayals of Africa and the variety of critical responses these representations have elicited from African intellectuals, authors, and commentators.
* Develop information literacy skills that will allow you to navigate our increasingly complex and often troubling news landscape.
* Learn how to locate, evaluate, and critically read both media and scholarly sources.
* Become more discerning, democratic, and exploratory in your consumption of news about Africa.
* Refine public oral communication and public speaking skills.
* Fulfill NW/SS/OC requirements.

Experiential Learning
This Experiential Learning course integrates the four principles of experiential learning--authenticity, relevancy, connection to future opportunities, and active learning--in a number of important and innovative ways.

Authenticity, is at the core of much of the work that we will do in this course because the vast majority of the course content is student-driven. The news stories that each of you bring into the classroom for further exploration will not only reflect your interests, they will also help you to identify and deepen your knowledge of the issues that are of greatest concern to you. Each of you has the power to shape the learning that we do in this class.

This course takes its inspiration from the principle of Relevancy, in that its designed to respond to the urgent need for greater information literacy on the part of students. This course will arm you with skills to successfully navigate what is an increasingly complex and often times troubling news landscape. The rise of 'fake news' has made evident and urgent what are actually more longstanding issues involving journalistic credibility and newsworthiness. In an information environment such as the one we currently live in, it is tempting to rely on 'trusted' news outlets, but that means a retreat from the diverse and democratic news space afforded to us by the internet. This has particularly troubling ramifications for how we understand Africa if we limit ourselves to Western news sources. This course will not only teach you how to be more discerning, but also more democratic and exploratory in your consumption of news.

Connecting experience to future opportunity means that you'll leave this course with skills that you will continue to draw on and develop in both your academic, personal, and professional lives. What constitutes a valid news source? How do we find sources we can trust? How can we ensure that our 'trusted' news sources aren't shaped by our own implicit biases about where reliable news comes from? What kinds of skills can we employ to make sense out of a news landscape that presents conflicting accounts of the same story, and doesn't cover other stories at all? Being able to productively answer these questions forms the learning outcome for this class. You will leave this course with a command over how to find news, how to read news, and then how to make sense of it through rigorous historical analysis.

Active learning is a principle that is thoroughly enshrined in this course. As you'll see from the syllabus, weeks 5 through 14 are currently completely blank. That's because we will build the syllabus collectively. The new stories you bring into the classroom with you, your ability to make cogent and persuasive arguments about why those issues matter to you and why they should matter to the rest of us, will determine what ends up on our syllabus. Together we will coproduce the syllabus and by extension we will co-construct the knowledge that each of you leaves the classroom with. In this sense peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher learning will be as essential to our pedagogical process as teacher-to-student learning.

Course Readings
You are expected to complete all readings and assignments on time as indicated on the course schedule. Bring all assigned readings with you to class and have them accessible before class begins.

Required Books
1. Rathbone and Parker, African History: A Very Short Introduction (Purchase)
2. Welsh and Wright, *Information Literacy in the Digital Age* (Free Library Access)

### Grading Structure

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<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Map Quiz</th>
<th>Module 1</th>
<th>Module 2</th>
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<th>Module 5</th>
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**Map Quiz**

A map quiz that requires you to identify each African country will take place on Tuesday, September 19th. You can prepare for the quiz by using these apps: [http://online.seterra.net/en/vgp/3034](http://online.seterra.net/en/vgp/3034) and [http://www.ilike2learn.com/ilike2learn/africa.html](http://www.ilike2learn.com/ilike2learn/africa.html). The map quiz counts for 15% of your course grade.

**Modules**

We will work in groups tasked with different elements of each module’s unique configuration—from sourcing and evaluating news stories and making the case for why we should devote a module to it, to curating the module’s reading list through a process of careful research that results in a thoughtful rationale for inclusion. Each module will require individually sourcing between 3-5 distinct news stories, supplying at least two different reports from varied media outlets about those stories, and then collectively vetting those stories in your assigned groups to arrive at the one news event that your group will present to the entire class for consideration in a process akin to a pitch. The entire class will collectively decide on which news story will become a module. Thereafter we will repeat a similar process for sourcing scholarly articles, and where feasible primary sources, which will be integrated into the module’s reading list. Each module is worth 10% of your final grade, and your engagement in all phases of building the modules and your mastery over them will determine your grade.

**Class Participation and Oral Presentations**

Engaged learning is a key to success in this course. Every class meeting will be one in which you are actively engaged in our hands-on work. To be successful at this you will need to make sure that you are actively monitoring the news cycle daily. Thus, the strength of your in-class participation will be dependent upon how engaged you are in the news cycle outside of class.

One of the goals of this course is to refine your public speaking and oral communication skills. We will do this through a series of oral presentations tied to each of the modules. You will be pitching news stories to the class and you will also be presenting rationales for the inclusion of secondary sources in each module’s reading list. We will focus not only on the content of what you have to say, but also on your delivery, paying special attention to clarity, brevity, and persuasiveness. The point of these presentations is not just to stimulate thoughtful discussion about the construction and content of our modules, it is also to help you achieve both comfort with and command over your public speaking voice. To further this goal, we will have two public speaking workshops over the course of the semester. Our work in this area will culminate in the delivery of eloquent presentations of your final projects at our information literacy forum.

**Final Project**

Over the course of the semester you will have worked collectively to build five distinct course modules. Your final project calls upon you to independently build your own module and present it during an information literacy forum hosted by our class that will be open to the Brandeis community. 35% of your final grade will be determined by your final project.

**Course Expectations**

**Weekly Time Commitment**

This is a Four-Credit Course (with 2.5 hours of class-time per week). Success in this 4-credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings and preparation for quizzes, oral presentations, and final project, etc.).
Attendance and Tardiness
Attendance is absolutely mandatory. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. The presence of every student is valued and unexcused absences risk disrupting the cohesion of the class. Repeated absences are disrespectful to me, as your professor, as well as to your fellow classmates. If you must miss a class, you must have a valid excuse (i.e. sickness or injury, family emergency) and inform me ahead of time. More than two unexcused absences will result in an automatic 1/3 reduction of your final grade. If for any reason you have more than two excused absences, you will need to make arrangements with me to be accountable to the work you’ve missed.

Being tardy is unacceptable. If you are more than 5 minutes late to class, you will be marked absent with a resultant deduction in your final grade based on the aforementioned attendance policy.

Classroom Conduct
Your classroom conduct will be a factor in your participation grade. You are expected to arrive to class on time, be attentive (no falling asleep), and focused (no cellphone use). Please use the restroom BEFORE you come to class. Students who interrupt class by leaving the classroom for water and bathroom breaks, to use the phone, or for any other reason will be asked not to return to class if the problem becomes persistent.

You are expected to maintain the highest standards of collegiality with your classmates and with me. Discussions of the course materials and content must be conducted with awareness that we all bring differing levels of knowledge, experience, and perspective to the subject matter. The sole criterion for contributions to class discussion is your engagement with the assigned readings and other course materials. If you’ve done the reading you are as prepared as anyone else to contribute to class discussions. If you have not done the reading please refrain for usurping discussion time with contributions that are not grounded in the assigned readings. Acts of disrespect will not be tolerated. Repeated disruptive behavior will result in your failure of the course.

Academic Integrity
You are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity as stated in Section 4 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook: http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rr/

Plagiarism and evidence of cheating on exams will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic failing grade. You may refer to the International Center for Academic Integrity for additional information: http://www.academicintegrity.org/icai/home.php

Disability Policy
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Academic Services (x63470 or brodgers@brandeis.edu.) Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

Computer Policy
Computers and other electronic devices, including iPads and other tablets, are not allowed in class. Please ensure that you print out articles and bring them to class with you.

Late Work and Extensions
I will not accept late work under any circumstance. On a case-by-case basis I may grant extensions to students facing hardships (sickness, injury, or family emergency) who request an extension BEFORE their work is late. Time management skills are critical assets and learning them now will serve you well.

Key Schedule Dates
January 18—Brandeis Monday, No Class
February 19-23—Midterm Recess
March 30-April 6—Spring Recess
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week #1
January 11: Africa in the Western Imagination
*Preliminary Map Quiz

Week #2
January 16: African History: Key Themes and Events
  *Reading: Rathbone and Parker, African History: A Very Short Introduction

January 18: Brandeis Monday—No Class

Week #3
January 23: Mediating Africa: Cliché or Catastrophic Tropes?
  *Reading: Bunce, Franks, and Patterson, Africa’s Media Image in the 21st Century (pp. 1-29 + assigned chapters for roundtable discussion)
  *Reading: Gilbert and Reynolds, “Notions of Africa” (L)

January 25: Clapback: Critiquing and Challenging Western Media Perceptions of Africa
  *Reading: Binyavanga Wainaina, “How to Write About Africa” (L)
  *Reading: Remi Adekoya, “Why Africans Worry About how Africa is Portrayed in Western Media” (L)
  *Reading: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story” (L)

Week #4
January 30: Information Literacy Boot Camp with Laura Hibbler Part I
  *Reading: Welsh and Wright, Information Literacy in the Digital Age (pp. 1-21; 53-79)

February 1: Information Literacy Boot Camp with Laura Hibbler Part II
  *Reading: Welsh and Wright, Information Literacy in the Digital Age (pp. 93-120)

Week #5
MODULE #1
February 6:

February 8:

Week #6
MODULE #1
February 13:
February 15:

Week #7
MODULE #2
February 27:

March 1: Laura Hibbler Joins Us

Week #8
MODULE #2
March 6:

March 8:
**Week #9**
MODULE #3
*March 13:*

*March 15:*

**Week #10**
MODULE #3
*March 20:*

*March 22:*

**Week #11**
MODULE #4
*March 27:*

*March 29:*

**Week #12**
MODULE #4
*April 10:*

*April 12:*

**Week #13**
MODULE #5
*April 17: Laura Hibbler Joins Us*

*April 19:*

**Week #14**
MODULE #5
*April 24:*

*April 26:*

*Information Literacy Forum, Date and Time TBA*