

CLASS SYLLABUS

AFRICAN LIFE HISTORIES

FALL SEMESTER, 2009

Professor Jamie Monson
Department of History
Macalester College

Office Hours: TTh 2-3:30 p.m.
Also by appointment
Phone Ext. 6597

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to personal narrative as a form of historical expression. We will read several published life histories, from anthropological recordings to slave narratives to autobiography and memoir. We will consult scholarly essays *about* life history as a genre, to help us discuss the methodology behind the production of these important texts. Our task is therefore twofold: as we learn about the lives of African men and women through their own stories, we will also examine the processes through which these stories are made available to us. The format of the course will be a discussion seminar, with intermittent background lectures where necessary.

ASSIGNMENTS

This course is based on discussion and engagement with historical texts within the setting of the small college seminar. For this reason, the primary responsibility for you, the student, is to do the assigned readings before each class; be sure to allow yourself time and space for thoughtful reflection; and engage actively in class conversation and debate.

This course is also a writing intensive course, and we will have a special focus on writing during the term. You will have an opportunity to write two different types of papers (2 short essays and a longer paper); to work on those papers in small groups; and to revise the papers into a polished form. All papers must be submitted using Moodle, to ensure access for writing partners. Because of the revision process **no late papers can be accepted**. It is your responsibility to contact me before the due date if you are having difficulty with the paper or with submission. You will receive a grade for the version you turn in BEFORE revision. I will give you an overall grade for your revisions and for your participation in the revision process as part of your final grade in the course.

The first two assignments are short (4-5 page) essays on specified topics; while the final paper is a longer research paper (10-12 pages) on a topic of your own choosing. The assignments are described in more detail below.

FIRST PAPER ASSIGNMENT: Life History Narratives

The goal of this paper is to explore a theme or question that has been brought up in class readings and discussion. Please select a theme or question **that interests you**. Then use examples from the class readings to explore your question and to support your viewpoint. Some possible topics include:

- The use of voice in a particular life history (i.e. the scholar, the narrator, the unseen audience, the academic experts)
- Representativeness in life history (use one text or compare more than one)
- Are life histories truthful?
- Change (personal, societal or both) in life history narratives

Length of paper: 4-6 pages

Due date: Thursday, October 7 by 5 pm **on Moodle** Polished version: Friday, October 16 by 5 pm **on Moodle**

SECOND PAPER ASSIGNMENT: Slave Narratives

The goal of this assignment is for you to write an essay about a theme or question related to our readings and discussion of slave narratives. As in the first assignment, select a theme or question that interests you. Then use the assigned readings to explore your question and to support your viewpoint. Examples of possible themes:

- The role of Christian conversion in slave narratives
- How the intended audience affects slave narratives
- Transmission and translation in slave narratives

Length of paper: 4-6 pages

Due dates: Tuesday, October 27 at 5 p.m. **on Moodle**. Polished version: Friday, November 6 at 5 p.m. **on Moodle**.

FINAL PAPER ASSIGNMENT

The goal of this assignment is for you to **research and write a paper** on an additional life history narrative, a set of narratives, or a special topic related to life history. Please select a narrative or a topic that is of interest to you. If you choose to read more than one additional narrative, you might think about the following suggested themes:

- Personal narratives of childhood in Africa
- Life histories of West African women
- Life history and memory of apartheid in South Africa

Once you have selected your topic, you will need to do research to collect information and to learn more about what has been written on this subject. Your paper should contain a statement of your viewpoint; a summary of what others have written about the subject; your own information that you have gathered to support your viewpoint; and a conclusion.

Length of paper: 10-12 pages

Due dates: Paper topics due **in class Monday, October 5** (2-3 paragraphs)

Annotated outline with bibliography due **Thursday, November 19 at 5 p.m. on Moodle**

First draft of paper due **Thursday, December 3 at 5 p.m on Moodle**

Final polished version due **Monday, December 14 by 5 pm on Moodle**

GRADING AND EVALUATION

A seminar course requires the full participation of each student. Each student is required to make regular contributions to discussion, to respect other class members, and to use good listening skills. During the term, students will also have the opportunity to lead class discussion.

Participation in discussion counts for 30 (forty) percent of your grade in this class.

Other assignments count as follows:

Participation in revision process: 10 percent

Essay assignments: 15 percent each (total of 30 percent)

Final paper assignment: 30 percent

CLASS OUTLINE

WEEK ONE

W 9/9 **Introductions**

F 9/11 Nisa -- The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman
Introduction and chapters 1 & 2

WEEK TWO

M 9/14 Nisa – The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman
Chapters 3-6
Background lecture on hunter-gatherer-forager history in Africa

W 9/16 Nisa-- The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman
Remaining chapters

F 9/18 **Film: Nai, The Story of a !Kung Woman**

WEEK THREE

M 9/21 **African Women and Oral History**

*Marjorie Shostak, "What the Wind Won't Take Away: The Genesis of Nisa--The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman," in Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives, Indiana, 1989, pp. 228-241.

*Susan Geiger, "What's So Feminist About Women's Oral History?" *Journal of Women's History* 2,1, (1990), 169-82.

W 9/23 **Whose Life Is It, Anyway? Class Debate**

*Kirk Hoppe, "Whose Life Is It, Anyway? Issues of Representation in Life Narrative Texts of African Women," The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 26,3 (1993), pp. 623-636.

*Heidi Gengenbach, "Truth-telling and the Politics of Women's Life History Research in Africa: A Reply to Kirk Hoppe," The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 27,3 (1994), pp. 619-628.

F 9/25 **Library Tour and Discussion of Research Strategies and Topic Selection**

WEEK FOUR

M 9/28 **Life Histories of Women in Kenya: Voices from Mutira**
Voices from Mutira, Introduction

W 9/30 Voices from Mutira, chapters 1-5

F 10/2 **Film: Mau Mau/White Highlands No More**

WEEK FIVE

M 10/5 **Research Topics Due in Class Today**
Class Discussion of Paper Topic Ideas and Framing Questions

W 10/7 Voices from Mutira, chapters 5-10

First Paper Assignment Due: Thursday, October 8 at 5 p.m. on Moodle

F 10/9 **Paper Writing Workshop I: Women's Life Histories**

WEEK SIX

M 10/12 **Slave Narratives: The Slave Trade and the Atlantic World**
Life of Olaudah Equiano, Introduction

W 10/14 Life of Olaudah Equiano, chapters 1-8

F 10/16 **Film: A Son of Africa**

First Paper Assignment Due, Polished Version: Friday, October 16 at 5 p.m.

WEEK SEVEN

M 10/19 Life of Olaudah Equiano, remaining chapters

W 10/21 **East African Slave Narratives: The Story of Swema**
E.A. Alpers, "The Story of Swema," in Robertson and Klein, Women and Slavery in Africa

F 10/22 **Whose Life Is It Anyway, revisited: Debates over the Story of Swema**
Bagamoyo Museum history of Swema's life
UNESCO Heritage Site debates
New questions about evidence

WEEK EIGHT

M 10/26 **An Integrated Approach to Life History?**
We Only Come Here to Struggle, introduction

Second Paper Assignment Due: Tuesday, October 27 at 5 p.m.

W 10/28 **Paper Writing Workshop II: Slave Narratives**

F 10/30 **FALL BREAK**

WEEK NINE

M 11/2 We Only Come Here to Struggle, chapters 1-3

W 11/4 **Film Showing: We Only Come Here to Struggle**

F 11/6 We Only Come Here to Struggle, chapters 4-5

Second Paper Assignment Due, Polished Version: Friday, November 6 at 5 p.m.

WEEK TEN

M 11/9 **Women's Lives Crossing Boundaries**
Lecture: South Africa's Apartheid and Resistance Movements

W 11/10 Mamphela Ramphela, Across Boundaries, chapters 1-3

F 11/12 **Film: Biko**

WEEK ELEVEN

M 11/16 Mamphela Ramphela, Across Boundaries, chapters 4-6
Steven Biko, I Write What I Like, selections

W 11/18 Mamphela Ramphela, Across Boundaries, remaining chapters

Annotated Outline and Bibliography for Research Paper Due Thursday, November 19 at 5 p.m. on Moodle

F 11/20 **In-Class Writing Workshop: Outlines and Bibliographies**

WEEK TWELVE

M 11/23 **Cultivating a Life: Wangari Maathai**
Wangari Maathai, *Unbowed*, chapters 1-5

W 11/25 Wangari Maathai, *Unbowed*, chapters 6-9

F 11/27 **THANKSGIVING BREAK**

WEEK THIRTEEN

M 11/30 Wangari Maathai, *Unbowed*, chapters 11-Afterword

W 12/2 **Film on Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement**

Draft of Final Research Paper due on Moodle Thursday, December 3 at 5 p.m.

F 12/4 **Writing Workshop: Final Research Paper Drafts**

WEEK FOURTEEN

M 12/7 **Return to Nisa**
Marjorie Shostak, Return to Nisa, pages 1-17 and 51-77

W 12/9 **Presentations in Class of Research Paper Results**

F 12/11 **Presentations in Class of Research Paper Results**

M 12/14 **Last Day of Class**

Final Research Papers due on Moodle on December 14 at 5 p.m.
