

# Geography of Africa

Geo 312 ✨ fall 2011 ✨ Tu/Th 3:55PM - 5:20PM

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Office hours: Tu/Th: 1-2, Wed. 4-5:30 or by appointment.

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Classroom: Centennial 3211

Virtual office hours Mondays and Fridays



One decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, much of the US public continues to sum up Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of horror in which war, poverty and disease run rampant. These blights are implicitly understood as rooted in the people and environment of the continent. Our perceptions of the continent are also informed by the sense that this is a place full of exotic people, animals and practices (for instance, left, photo of snake charmer from colonial East Africa). Certainly fighting with many civilian casualties is underway in the Congo, Southern African populations have been devastated by HIV/AIDS and parts of Africa do have

exquisite flora and fauna. But we should neither exoticize Africans nor believe that they exist in misery. Instead the diversity of present day life on the continent must be understood through a careful exploration of Africa's physical and social geography and its historical, cultural and economic relationship to other parts of the world. The extraction of slaves, the division of the continent into colonies and the arming of militias during the Cold War are key among these relationships. More recently development initiatives, debt levels and neoliberal economic



policies have made life difficult for many Africans with the greater benefit accruing to the Global North. Nonetheless, African peoples have shown enormous ingenuity in environmental management, art, music, architecture, engineering, trade and agriculture. The continent is the site of major cities with thriving businesses, strong civil societies and vibrant cultural scenes. Students should come away from the course with the realization that neither a pessimistic nor romantic view of Sub-Saharan African realities affords us an understanding of this complex place.



Text: Stock, Robert. 2004. *Africa South of the Sahara: A Geographical Interpretation*, 2nd edition. NY: Guilford.

The order and number of reading assignments may change.

Week	Date	Topic and assignments
1	Sept. 6, 8	<b>Images and Realities of Africa</b> Introduction and Overview 1-56 Christian Science Monitor 5 Myths about Africa
2	Sept. 13, 15	<b>Physical Context</b> <b>The Physical Environment 57-98</b>  Map quiz 1 Sept. 13: Know the countries of the continent, colonial boundaries and major physical features
3	Sept. 20, 22	<b>Historical Context</b> Africa in Historical Perspective 99-146  Map quiz 2 Sept. 20: Know locations of major ethnic, religious and language groups, historically important sites
4	Sept. 27, 29	<b>Social Geographies</b>  Dynamics of Population 147-192
5	Oct. 4, 6	Gender, Youth, Health 281-322
6	Oct. 11, 13	<b>Urban Geographies</b>  Urban Economies and Societies 239-280
7	Oct. 18, 20	<b>Food and society</b>  Rural economies 193-238 Oct 20 Exam 1 on reading and lectures inclusive of week 7
8	Oct. 25, 27	
9	Nov. 1, 3	<b>Africa in the Global Economy</b> Resources 323-364
10	Nov. 8, 10	African Economies 365-406 Conclusion 449-454
11	Nov. 15, 17	Political Geography: Regional Case Studies 407-448  Nov. 15 Upload abstracts for executive summary and individual chapter.
12	Nov. 22	Thanksgiving Nov. 24
13	Nov. 29, Dec. 1	Development reports due Nov. 29
14	Dec. 6, 8	Student presentations and discussion
15	Dec. 13	Take home exam 2 on readings and lectures from Oct. 25 to the end of class Upload to dropbox on or before Dec. 21

### Expectations

- Read required readings before the first day of class each week.
- Attend all classes unless excused for sickness or emergency.
- Contribute constructively in every class
- Submit all assignments on time

**Your grade will be derived from the following:**

2 map quizzes: 5% total

2 exams (15% each): 30%

Participation: 20%

Writing assignment (25%) and associated presentation (20%): 45%

No extra credit

**Grade Scale**

A = 100-93%

AB = 92-88%

B = 87-83%

BC = 82-78%

C = 77-70%

D = 69-60%

F = 59% and below

You must take the quizzes and do your presentation during the scheduled timeframe unless you have spoken to me two weeks in advance to arrange for a different time. In the event of an emergency or severe illness, it is your responsibility to request a different date by email. I must approve your request for a schedule change. Please provide a doctor's note or other appropriate proof that you could not do the assignment on the scheduled date. No communication will result in an F for the assignment.

**Exams:** Non-comprehensive. These may include essay and short answer questions. The questions will come from lecture, discussion and readings.

**Map quizzes:** Memorize locations and reproduce in class.

**Participation:** To participate effectively and receive full credit you must attend class and do the reading prior to coming. For each reading assignment, please write a summary outlining the main conceptual points presented. To some extent this will be your choice of what's important, interesting, or new in the material you've read. At the beginning of each week I will check that you have done this. You will be graded on these summaries and the effort you make to respond to questions and to offer interpretations. Given the level and size of the class, everyone will be expected to participate in every class.

**Writing assignment**

**Reports:** The class will be divided into groups. You will work individually and collectively to assemble a development assessment and action plan for a major region of Sub-Saharan Africa: 1) Sahelian West Africa, 2) Coastal West Africa, 3) Central Africa, 4) Horn of Africa, 5) East Africa, and 6) Southern Africa. Each report will be composed of an executive summary penned by the group that includes a summary of each chapter as well as an overview of the major development challenges and opportunities of the region (2-3 single spaced pages). Be sure to include opportunities or positive aspects.

Individual chapters (5 pages single spaced) should cover a specific development sector for the region (education, gender and development, food and agriculture, conservation and environment, politics/governance, urban development, economic development, reproductive rights and health).

Chapters should review the main development challenges in the specific sector for the region, their causes and how they have been understood and addressed. These should reckon with the pre and post independence period as part of your analysis. Supporting your analysis, propose other possible solutions to one or two specific issues. Upload a brief abstract of what you plan to cover in your individual chapter and an abstract outlining what will be covered in your executive summary.

**Presentation**

Each group will make a 15 minute presentation of the regional development assessment and action plan. You must coordinate with your partner to ensure these are professionally done.

You will be evaluated on the quality of the analysis, your ability to apply what you have learned in class and the quality of your sources. Sources must include peer reviewed journal articles in addition to NGO, government aid agency and UN publications and magazine and newspaper articles.