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840:332  **African Religion**
Spring 2002



Pr. Richard M. Shain

109 Language Lab

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OBJECTIVES

This course explores the multifaceted world of African religion from an interdisciplinary perspective, bringing together insights and readings from religious studies, anthropology, history, cultural geography, and literature. The course primarily examines the cultural logic through which Africans have organized their spiritual lives. It demonstrates how Africans have used the openness of their indigenous religions to incorporate new religious elements and embark on new theological speculations. In particular, the course emphasizes the historical dimensions in African religion, showing constant change in belief and practice. The course closes by looking at the contributions of African religion to contemporary African popular culture and the still vital role African religion plays in African political life.

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REQUIRED TEXTS**

Kwame Gyekye *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*

Benjamin Ray *African Religions*

Paul Stoller & Chery Olkes *In Sorcery's Shadow*

Course Packet

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS_ :

Essay on Reading – 15%

Mid Term – 20%

Research Paper –25%

Final Exam – 25%

Class Participation – 15%

(Note: To receive a passing grade, you must complete **all** course requirements)

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TOPICS_ :

1. The Multiple Realities of African Religion
2. Cosmologies in Motion
3. The Old Men Are Coming Home: Ancestral Veneration
4. Making Women's Worlds: Prophecy and Divination
5. Religion and Resistance
6. Is There a Word for It?: Evil, Good and Free Will in African Religion
7. The Modernity of Witchcraft
8. Earth, Rain and Fire: Rainmaking and Other Forms of Environmental Control
9. Cults and Culture: Regional Cults and Cults of Affliction
10. Flashes of the Spirit, Objects of Power: Masquerades and Cult Objects
12. The Invention of *Traditional* Religion
13. The Future of the Past: African Religion in the Twenty-First Century

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READING ASSIGNMENTS AND CLASS CALENDAR:***

January 24: Course Orientation.

January 31: Ray: 1–25; Packet Selections – Armstrong & Onwuejeogwu.

February 7: Gyekye: 59–104; Packet Selection – Drewal.

February 14: Ray: 72–92; Packet Selections – Abímbólá & Shaw.

February 21: Ray: 92–104; Packet Selection – Stoller.

February 28: Gyeke: 104–187.

March 8: **ESSAY ON READING DUE** (topic to be distributed in class).

March 15: **MID – TERM.**

March 22: Spring Break

March 29: Ray: 104–112; Stoller: 1–49; Packet Selection – Willis.

April 4: Stoller: 49–149.

April 11: Stoller: 153–232; Packet Selection – Geschiere.

April 18: Ray: 112–143; Film: *Ye/een* (Mali, Souleymane Cisse, 1987).

April 25: **RESEARCH PAPER DUE.**

May 2: Packet Selections – Barber & Appiah.

May 9: Concluding Discussions.

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TESTS AND CLASS POLICIES**

I will administer two types of exams during the course. The mid-term will be in essay form and will be based on both the lectures and the text books. You will be required to answer two questions out of four. The final exam, like the mid-term, will be in essay form. It will be weighted heavily towards the lectures and readings after the mid-term, although some questions might be cumulative. You will be required to answer four questions out of the set of twelve. The questions will be restricted to material encompassed by the course in class and in the readings. What we do **not** cover on the syllabus will **not** appear on the final exam.

Make-up exams: It is your responsibility to show up adequately prepared for exams. Please ensure that you start any vacation **after** the final exam since under no circumstances is it

possible to take the final exam other than on the scheduled date. If a family crisis occurs or if you are not well, I will schedule a make-up test *only* after you obtain permission from the academic dean of your college. Failure to take a test for any other reason on the dates announced in *class* will result in an automatic grade of "0".

Class Participation: I will base your class participation grade on both regular attendance and the quality of your contribution to class discussions. You will receive a preliminary class participation grade when your mid-term exam is returned. During the last class you will receive your final participation grade.



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