Dress, Cloth and Identity in Africa and the Diaspora
FWS - HIST 1451 • TR 11:40 – 12:55 • GSH 122

Instructor: Prof. Judith Byfield
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Course Rationale:
Fashion houses such as Chanel and Dior have long incorporated African inspired fabrics, but the trend is growing. Why are African fabrics showing up on the catwalks of L.A.M.B. and H & M? This course uses a multi-disciplinary approach to examine the importance of textiles in African social and economic history and the long engagement between African consumers and textile producers from other world regions. It combines art history, anthropology as well as social and economic history to explore the role of textiles and dress in marking status, gender, political authority and ethnicity. In addition, we examine the production and distribution of indigenous and imported cloth as well as the consequences of colonial rule and contemporary globalization on African textile industries and consumers. Our analysis also considers the principles of African aesthetics and dress that continue to shape the African diaspora in the Americas.

Course Aims and Objectives:
The main goal of this course is to consider the variety of historical processes and questions that can be explored in African history through an analysis of cloth, its production and social uses. It is intended also to help students develop facility with the use of material culture in the reconstruction of historical events and moments. Finally, the seminar is designed to help students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as writers and to develop strategies to become even more effective writers.

Format and Procedures:
This class will meet twice a week for seventy five minutes. Students are expected to arrive to class on time, attend each class session, actively listen and participate. Active participation requires completing the readings before class and coming to class with relevant notes. This class is discussion based. Therefore, you are expected to come to each class prepared to offer an analysis of the readings. Finally, learning is a collaborative process therefore individually and collectively we share the responsibility of creating a respectful atmosphere where knowledge and critical insights are exchanged, disagreements inspire and learning occurs.

Course Requirements:
• Students must come prepared to discuss the readings assigned for each meeting and complete any homework assignments.
• Five short essays of varying lengths. The first essay will not be graded. Drafts of essays 2 and 3 will be peer reviewed. Only final drafts will be submitted for essays 4 & 5.
• An exhibit at the Cornell Garment and Textile Gallery in the College of Human Ecology for which each student will contribute one item or display. Items to be selected from the garment and textile collection.
• An eight page research paper based on the item selected for the gallery show; a 250 word abstract and an annotated bibliography of at least five sources.
• A ten (10) minute presentation of the research topic that demonstrates clearly how the exhibition piece connects to the research paper.

**Exhibit Opening:**
We will officially open the exhibit on December 4th and it will remain in the gallery until the end of January, 2016. As a group we will prepare a brief introduction to the exhibit where you will discuss the salient issues that determined your selection. Guests will be invited to the opening and it will be followed by a reception.

Use of sources: Reference citations must be clear and correct, and the use of information from other sources must be clear and responsible. A consistent style for citations must be used (e.g., MLA or Chicago) throughout the paper. Visit the Cornell library web-site [http://www.library.cornell.edu/services/citing.html](http://www.library.cornell.edu/services/citing.html) for examples of different styles of citations.

**Readings:** Required and recommended readings are listed below. You are expected to complete all the readings before class. The required books are available for purchase at the Cornell Store. In addition, copies of the required books are on reserve in Olin Library. Electronic copies of all other readings -journal articles and book chapters- will be available through Course Reserve on our Blackboard site.

**Required Books:**


**Attendance:** Since this course is discussion based, attendance is required. More than two unexcused absences will affect your final grade and could result in a failing grade.

**Grades:** Your performance on the essays, research paper and class participation will be factored into your final grade. Your grades will be calculated along the following guidelines. The short essays will account for 55% of the final grade, abstract and annotated bibliography 10%, the research paper 25% and participation 10%.

**Academic Integrity**
Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work.

You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts. You can give "consulting" help to or receive "consulting" help from such students.
However, this permissible cooperation should never involve one student having possession of a copy of all or part of work done by someone else, in the form of an e-mail, an e-mail attachment file, a diskette, or a hard copy.

Should copying occur, both the student who copied work from another student and the student who gave material to be copied will both automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Code can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

Accommodations for students with disabilities
In compliance with the Cornell University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first three weeks of the semester, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

Religious observance
Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during this academic term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please speak with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Commercial Internet Sites for Course Materials
Materials prepared for this course, *Dress, Cloth and Identity in Africa and the Diaspora*, whether in hard copy or in digital formats and posted on Blackboard are intellectual property belonging to the author (the professor or instructor). Materials include, but are not limited to: syllabi, exams, lecture notes, course assignments. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials without the express permission of the author. Such unauthorized behavior constitutes academic misconduct.

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**Week I**

**Aug 25:** Overview of Course  
**Film:** *Mama Benz and the Taste of Money*

**Aug 27:** The Goal of Academic Writing  

Homework: Summarize either the selection from Graff and Birkenstein or the selection from Rampolla. Discuss writing schedule.

*First Draft Essay #1 (250 words) due by noon Sunday, August 30th.*

*Topic:* What are the main goals of historical writing?

**Week II**

*Sept 1:* Discuss Essay #1.

*Sept 3:* Meet at the Cornell Costume and Textile Collection (Human Ecology Building).

*Final Draft Essay #1 due by noon Sunday, Sept. 6th.*

**Week III**

*Sept 8:* How to read a book


*Homework:* Come prepared discuss the readings and to describe how you actively read this text.

*Sept 10:* How to read a book


*Homework:* Summarize the text in outline form. Submit summary at the end of class.

**Week IV**

*First Draft Essay #2 (500 words) due by noon Monday, Sept. 14th.*

*Topic:* Write a critique/review of *The Politics of Dress in Somali Culture.*

*Sept 15:* Individual meetings

*Sept 17:* Individual meetings

**Week V**

*Final draft of Essay #2 due by noon Monday, Sept 21st.*

*Sept 22:* “Wrapped in Pride: The Story of Kente in America”
In class exercise: critique the documentary.
**Sept 24:** No Class – “Reading” Cloth  


**Homework:** Summarize readings by Kriger, Adams, Perani & Wolff in outline form & submit.  
Create a tip sheet for peer review.

**Week VI**

**Sept 29:** Discussion of summaries and tip sheet.

*First Draft of Essay #3 (500 words) due by 6:00 pm Tuesday, Sept 30th.*

**Topic:** Kriger argues that material culture refers to the analysis of objects as primary sources for pursuing multiple questions (7). Identify three questions scholars can pursue using cloth and draw examples from our readings and films.

**Oct 1:** *Peer Review First Essay #3*

**Week VII**

**Oct 6:** Library Visit  

**Oct 8:** “Reading” a photograph and a primary source.  
In class exercise.

*Final draft of Essay #3 due in class Thursday, Oct 8th.*

**Week VIII**

**Oct 13:** *Fall Break*
Oct 15:  Understanding Colonialism  
*Film:* Basil Davidson, “This Magnificent African Cake”.

Week IX

Oct 20:  Fashion, Identity and Colonialism  


Oct 22:  Cotton, Textile Production and the Colonial Economy  


**Essay #4 (1,000 words) due by noon Monday, October 26th.**

*Topic:* While colonialism transformed African societies in multiple ways and on multiple levels, African culture did not disappear, Africans still exercised agency and imperial powers were not able to accomplish all their goals. How do our readings on dress and textile production illustrate the complex encounter between African societies and European imperial powers?

Week X

Oct 27:  Dress and the Body Politic  


**Oct 29:** *Africa, Dress and the Global Economy*
*Film:* *Abloni* – discusses second-hand clothing in Africa.

### Week XI

**Nov 3:** *Africa, Cloth and the Global Economy*


**Nov 5:** *Africa, Dress and the Global Economy*


**Essay #5 (1,000 words) due by noon Nov 9th:**
*Topic:* Dress offers a way to engage in larger political debates and discussions. Drawing on our readings identify ways in which dress and textiles have become part of political debates at the national and international levels.

### Week XII

**Nov 10:** Individual Appointments/Research

**Nov 12:** Individual Appointments/Research
Week XIII

Nov 17: Discuss Exhibit

Nov 19: Set up display

Week XIV

Nov 23: Set up display

Nov 25: *Happy Thanksgiving*

Week XV

*Abstract and Annotated Bibliography due by noon, Monday Nov. 30th.*

Dec 1: *Presentations of research paper*

Dec 3: *Presentations on research paper*

Dec. 4: *Opening Gallery Exhibit*