Instructor: Prof. Judith Byfield  
Office: 320 McGraw Hall  
Tel: 254-5334

Office Hrs: Thur. 2:00 – 4:00 pm  
and by appointment

Course Rationale:
This course uses a multidisciplinary approach to explore the complex relationship between history and popular culture in Africa. The course considers two main questions - How can you write history using popular culture? And how do artists use history to create popular culture? It uses examples from around the continent to explore old and new forms of popular culture; forms of cultural expression used by historians; as well as the ways in which artists use moments of great historical significance or key historical actors in their works. We consider, for example, the work of Leroy Vail who used songs by Mozambican peasants to write a social history of colonialism as well as novels about colonialism by Chinua Achebe.

Course Aims and Objectives:
This course is intended to introduce students to African popular culture while refining their skills as students of history. Throughout the term students will practice critical reading skills that will assist them in interpreting, weighing and evaluating evidence; and identifying and engaging historiographical debates. This course is intended also to help students craft historical essays and utilize evidence efficiently.

Format and Procedures:
This class meets for twice a week for 75 minutes each. Students are expected to attend each class session, arrive to class on time, actively listen and participate. Active participation includes taking notes, asking questions, contributing insights and ideas to the discussion. During discussion you are expected to bring copies of the readings under discussion.

Finally, learning is a collaborative process therefore individually and collectively we share the responsibility for creating a respectful atmosphere where knowledge and critical insights are exchanged, disagreements inspire and learning occurs. To help foster this learning environment, please turn off cell phones during class and only use a computer for taking notes (no e-mail or web-surfing).

Course Requirements:
Assignments: The schedule of assignments are listed below.

• Three short papers. Papers must be double spaced, four pages in length and must respond to discussion questions. You may choose the discussion question to which you will respond. Select one discussion question from Discussion 1 – 4; a second from Discussion 5 - 8; and a third from discussion 9 – 13. These essays are due at the time of
the relevant discussion. One paper must be submitted by: September 15, October 18, and November 22nd.

• **Film Review:** Select one of the four required films and write a four (4) page review. You must support your discussion with secondary sources. The film review is due noon November 2nd.

• **Abstract/Annotated Bibliography.** A one page abstract and annotated bibliography are due during our final class meeting (November 29th). Failure to submit the abstract and bibliography will be reflected in the grade on your paper.

• **Final Research Paper.** The paper must be double spaced, seven (7) pages in length. In this paper you must apply the analytical tools you have developed over the course of the semester. Select an example of a particular form of popular culture and discuss the historical data or insights your selected genre of popular culture will provide to scholars in the future. The final paper is due by noon December 11th.

*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 readings are listed below. The required books are available for purchase at the Cornell Store. In addition, copies of the required books are on reserve in Uris Library. Electronic copies of all other readings -journal articles and book chapters- are available through Blackboard.*

*Required Books:*


Required Films: These films must be viewed before the relevant discussion.
• Keita
• Half a Yellow Sun
• Finding Fela!
• African Underground: Democracy in Dakar

Attendance: I take attendance at the beginning of each class. Students are allowed two unexplained absences. Each subsequent absence will result in the loss of one third of a letter grade (i.e. B+ to B, etc.) on the final grade.

Grades: Your performance on the essays and class participation will be factored into your final grade. Your grades will be calculated along the following guidelines. The short essays and film review will account for 60% of the final grade, the research paper 30% 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 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, *History and Popular Culture in Africa*, whether in hard copy or in digital formats and posted on Blackboard are intellectual property belonging to the author. 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 instructor. Such unauthorized behavior constitutes academic misconduct.

**Weekly Reading and Written Assignments**

**Week I**

Aug. 23th: **Defining Popular Culture**  
*Readings:*  


Aug. 25th: **Discussion # 1**

**Week II**

Aug. 30th: **History and Oral Traditions - The Mali Empire**  
*Readings:*  

Sept 1st: **Discussion #2**  
The film *Keita* is streamed. Please view before discussion on September 1st.

**Week III**

Sept 6th: **Telling History Through Popular Culture**  
*Readings:*  
Sept 8th:  Discussion #3

Week IV

Sept. 13th:  Colonialism in Africa – Separating Fact from Fiction
Readings:


Sept 15th:  Discussion #4

Week V

Sept 20th:  Challenging Colonial Fictions
Readings:


Sept 22nd:  Discussion #5

Week VI

Sept 27th:  Navigating Colonial Society
Readings:


Sept 29th: Discussion #6

**Week VII**

Oct 4th: Challenging Colonial Society
Readings:


Oct 6th: Discussion #7

**Week VIII**

Oct 10th: Fall Break

Readings:


**Week IX**

Oct 18th: Discussion #8

Oct 20th: History, War and Popular Culture
Readings:


View “Half of a Yellow Sun” by discussion on Oct. 25th.

Week X

Oct 25th: Discussion #9

Oct 27th: The War of the Everyday – Fela Kuti
Readings:


Please view *Finding Fela* before our discussion on Nov. 1st.

Week XI

Nov 1st: Discussion #10

Nov 2nd – Film review due by noon.

Nov 3rd: Culture and Crisis – AIDS and Ebola
Readings:


7
http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/19/when-fever-breaks


**Week XII**

Nov 7th: Lecture – Prof. Monica Green – 165 McGraw, 4:30 pm

Nov 8th: *Discussion with Prof. Monica Green #11*

Nov. 10th: *Youth, Popular Culture and Globalization*

**Readings:**


Please view *African Underground: Democracy in Dakar* before discussion on Nov 15th.

**Week XIII**

Nov 15th: *Discussion #12*

Nov 17th: *Archiving Social Change in Africa*

**Readings:**


Week XIV

Nov 22nd:   *Discussion #13*

Nov 24th:   **Happy Thanksgiving!!**

Week XV

Nov 29th:   Discussion – Research Topics (Abstract and annotated bibliography due).

Dec 1st:   No Class.