

## AFRICAN WOMEN'S LIVES PAST AND PRESENT

AFRC 2220 401; GSWs 2220 401  
Tuesdays 5:30 – 8:20 pm  
Spring 2023

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601 568-5323, 10 am to 9 pm only

### Course Description

The course highlights specific African women leaders who have exercised power in political, religious, and economic spheres from ancient times to today. It considers their leadership roles, challenges and accomplishments, gender fluidity, and the construction of legendary heroine narratives. It also raises questions about sources, methodology, and representation, including oral history and folklore as avenues to insider perspectives.

### Course Texts

Gbowee, Leymah 2011 *Mighty Be Our Powers, A Memoir*. New York, NY: Beast Books  
Getz, Trevor and Liz Clarke 2015 *Abina and the Important Men*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. ISBN-13: 978-0190238742  
Thornton, John 1998 *The Kongolesse Saint Anthony, Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

### Additional Selected Readings from these texts (to be provided as electronic readings “ER”)

Achebe, Nwando 2005 *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, pp. 161-224.  
Bastian, Misty “‘Vultures of the Marketplace’: Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* (Women’s War) of 1929.”  
Boahen, A. Adu 2003 *Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900-1*. Oxford: J. Currey.  
Geiger, Susan 1997 *TANU Women, Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.  
Maathai, Wangari 2006 *Unbound: A Memoir*. New York, NY: Random House.  
Sweetman, David 1984 *Women Leaders in African History*. London, UK: Heinemann.

### Activities & Assignments

In this course you will be asked to read books and articles, watch films, and do three types of writing. The phrase “three types of writing” may need some explanation.

1. Keep a journal of your reactions to films shown in class, including information you learn from the films, questions they raise, and connections you see with course readings, discussions, and other films. The entry for each week should be at least a page long,

written in an informal style. Hand in your journal writings every week. They will be read and returned so that you can submit the entire semester's journal, bound as a notebook with a complete table of contents, at the end of the semester.

2. We will read books, excerpts from books, and articles authored by Nwando Achebe, Misty Bastian, A. Adu Boahen, Trevor Getz and Liz Clarke, Susan Geiger, David Sweetman, Leymah Gbowee, Wangari Maathai, and John Thornton and watch several films. You are asked to complete 5 unit assignments selected by you from 6 options (500+ words each) based on these readings and films. For full credit, the unit assignment must be handed in by the next class after the final day of the unit.
3. Complete a research paper on a topic of your choice. This assignment is an opportunity to explore a topic or region of Africa not otherwise focused on in the course. Covering African Women's Lives Past and Present in sixteen weeks necessarily leaves out a great deal, so you can use this assignment to extend what we treat in class or explore an area or topic we do not cover. Your paper should be at 8-12 pages in length, enough to handle a topic in some depth but still short enough to edit easily, with a substantial reference page.

## **Evaluation**

Students often want to know how things "count." Although this concern is reasonable, my foremost concern is that you are engaged and excited about learning. If you are guided by this higher motivation, the grades will take care of themselves. For calculation purposes, the film journals, the five response papers, and the term paper count equally as 30 % each of the overall grade. Attendance in zoom classes is 10%. If you cannot attend a zoom class you may watch the zoom recording and submit class notes. There are no tests or exams in this course.

## **Tentative Schedule**

### **Week 1, Jan. 17 Introduction**

**Ancient to Renaissance African Queens, Queen Hatshepsut (Egypt)**

*Ten African Queens* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n89Ks2lZq5Q>

### **Week 2, Jan. 24 Ancient to Renaissance African Queens**

*Unit Assignment 1: Prepare and share a 5-10 min. visual presentation on an assigned African queen.*

### **Week 3, Jan. 31 Ancient to Renaissance African Queens**

*Class film: Africa's Great Civilizations*

**Week 4, Feb. 7 Religious Transformation, and Female Leadership in early 18th Century Kingdom of the Kongo**

Before class read: Thornton, John *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita*, Introduction – Ch. 4, pp. 1 – 104.

Class film: Excerpt from Ali Mazrui *The Africans*, Episode 3

**Week 5, Feb. 14 Religious Transformation, and Female Leadership in 18th Century Kingdom of the Kongo**

Before class read: Thornton, John *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, Chs. 5 – 9.

Class film: *Arusi ya Bi Mariamu*

*Unit Assignment 2: Write a 500+ word essay on Dona Beatrice. Topic options will be discussed in class. Hand in Week 6.*

**Week 6, Feb. 21 From Archive Fragments to “Graphic History”: Slavery, early Colonialism, Women’s Rights, and the Law in 19th Century Ghana**

Before class read: Getz, Trevor and Liz Clarke *Abina and the Important Men*, pp. xiii - xix, 5 - 82

Class film: *Asante Market Women*, part 1.

**Week 7, Feb. 28 From Archive Fragments to “Graphic History”: Slavery, early Colonialism, Women’s Rights, and the Law in 19th Century Ghana**

Read: Getz, Trevor and Liz Clarke *Abina and the Important Men*, pp. 115 - 184

Class film: *Mrs. Goundo’s Daughter*

*Unit Assignment 3: Write a 500+ word essay on similarities and differences between Abina and Mrs. Goundo. Hand in Week 8.*

**Week 8, Mar. 7 Spring Break, No Class**

**Week 9, Mar. 14 The Agojie Warriors of Dahomey**

Read: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/real-warriors-woman-king-dahomey-agojie-amazons-180980750/>

Film: *The Woman King*

*Unit Assignment 4: Write a 500+ word essay discussing the historical basis and historians’ critique of the Hollywood film The Woman King*  
*By next week (Mar. 21) Submit a research paper proposal of at least 250 words plus at least four sources. You are allowed to use online sources.*

**Week 10, Mar. 21 Women's Responses to 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Colonialism in West Africa**

**Part 1: The War of the Golden Stool, Yaa Asantewaa**

Read: **ER** A. Adu Boahem "Ch. 4, The Role of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in the War."

**Part 2: Ogu Umunwaanyi (Women's War) of 1929**

Read: **ER** Misty L. Bastian "'Vultures of the Marketplace': Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* (Women's War) of 1929;"

*Unit Assignment 5: Write a 500+ word essay on Yaa Asantewa or The Ogu Umunwaanyi (Women's War).*

**Week 11 Mar. 28 Women's Activism in East Africa**

**Part 1: The Nationalist Movement in Tanganyika (Tanzania)**

Read: **ER** Susan Geiger *TANU, Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965*

Film clips: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6noZPkLwwU> (first 5 minutes);

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnklBcI1KPc> (first 3 minutes)

**Week 12, Apr. 4 Women's Activism in East Africa**

**Part 2: The Green Belt Movement in Kenya**

Read: **ER** excerpt from Wangari Maathai *Unbound*.

Film: *Taking Root, The Vision of Environmentalist Wangari Maathai*

*Unit Assignment 6: Write a 500+ word description of a film you would direct on Bibi Titi Mohammad's life or write a 500+ word essay on the challenges faced by Wangari Maathai and her response to these challenges. Submit via email Week 13.*

**Week 13, Apr. 11 Liberian Women Leaders in the 21st Century:**

**Leymah Gbowee and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**

Read: Leymah Gbowee *Might Be Our Power, Chapters 1 - 6*

Film: *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*

<https://www-filmplatform-net.proxy.library.upenn.edu/product/pray-devil-back-hell/>

**Week 14, Apr. 18 Liberian Women Leaders in the 21st Century:**

**Leymah Gbowee and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**

Read: Leymah Gbowee *Might Be Our Power, Chapters 7 - 21*

Film: *Iron Ladies of Liberia*

*Unit Assignment 7: Write a 500+ word essay on Leymah Gbowee, her life challenges and strengths as a leader. Submit on Apr. 26*

**Week 15, Apr. 25 Student Presentations**

*Note: Today is the last day you can submit rewritten assignments for regrading.*

**Week 16, May 2 OPTIONAL class meeting for presentations not given on Apr. 25**