This class provides an introduction to, and interpretation of, the social scientific and historical research on African development. The emphasis is on economic and political development in the longue durée and trying to understand how Africa fits into the comparative picture. The focus of much research on contemporary African development is of course on poverty, famine, civil war and the immense economic challenges that the continent has faced since independence. We shall study these and their roots and also many of the political correlates that go along with them, such as the weakness of African states, their corruption and problems of autocracy and democracy. But to get a deep understanding of these phenomena entails understanding Africa society, how it is organized, why it is organized as it is, and how it has come into collision with global forces in the past 500 years.

My own perspective, that will emerge as the course proceeds, is that one can think historically African society, though there is a great deal of variation, as organized around a few pivotal trade-offs. The most important was around the problem of creating and controlling hierarchy. Notably, African lagged Eurasia in the creation of centralized state authority and instead society was organized in a number of different ways: through kinship, age, or other types of corporate groups such as secret societies. Though states did emerge they did so relatively recently and they differed in key ways from European states. The reason for this very different historical pattern of political development is that Africans came up with very creative ways of both stopping centralized authority emerging and also finding substitutes for what it could achieve. This equilibrium, however, left African societies very vulnerable to the pernicious forces unleashed in the modern era, particularly the slave trade, colonialism, the cold war and post-colonial economic globalization. The combination of these things, along with the historical legacies of African institutions, has created a very difficult terrain to create prosperity and peace in the post-colonial world.

Despite these challenges, everything isn’t bleak in Africa. Far from it. The very historical strategies that avoided hierarchy can be harnessed to build new political orders, once stereotypes of what ‘states’ are supposed to look like can be overcome. Moreover, we have much to learn from African values and society. I hope that the course can convey the intellectual excitement of studying Africa and how it challenges our understanding of world historical processes. The sheer variation in Africa makes it an incredible laboratory for understanding human societies and I think that is personally why I find it so interesting. In Sierra Leone you can stand in a village where everyone speaks Temne, 5 kilometers to the West everyone speaks Loko, and 5 kilometers to the North everyone speaks Limba. That linguistic variation is mirrored by a great deal of institutional and cultural variation. Women can be chiefs in Mendeland, but not elsewhere in Sierra Leone.
Limba chiefs have supernatural powers, Mende chiefs are secular. But it’s not a simple picture of ethnic differences and polarized identities. The Mende and Loko share relationships of cousinage, or joking cousins, which creates binds which stretch across simple notions of “ethnicity”.

The course is not technical and open for Masters Students, undergraduates and doctoral students. For the latter, I have added a range of additional material which makes for a more in depth reading list and which relates the lectures to the more detailed social scientific literature on Africa.

There are no textbooks but we will read all of the following books

April 1: Lecture 1: Some Puzzles and Questions

Rusbridger, Alan (2007) “Can we, together, lift one village out of the Middle Ages?”
https://www.theguardian.com/katine/2007/oct/20/about

Additional Sources:
A useful discussion of how poor Africa really was historically is:
For an interesting perspective on how Africa is different
Bohannan, Laura (1966) “Shakespeare in the Bush,” Natural History,
http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/editors_pick/1966_08-09_pick.html

April 3: Lecture 2: An African Society

Schapera, Isaac (1977) “Kinship terminology in Jane Austen's novels” (Occasional paper - Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland ; no. 33)

**Additional Sources:**

**Additional Thoughts:**
Somalia has become quite a testing ground for theoretical debates

April 8: Lecture 3: Another African Society: The Igbo


**Additional Sources:**
Historical Igboland:
I’m not saying it’s an accurate historical record but it is wonderful. We’ll read the whole trilogy. You can’t be interested in Africa and not read it. Invaluable is Wren, Robert M. (1980) *Achebe’s World*, Washington: Three Continents Press.
Modern Igboland:

April 10: Lecture 4: Confronting a Fundamental Problem


**Additional Sources:**
I will talk a bit about stranger kings (like King Shyaam in the Kuba kingdom)
And secret societies
And masks….

**April 15: Lecture 5: Political Orders**


**Additional Sources:**
Grappling with the same issues
European analogies

**April 17: Lecture 6: Economic Structures: The Dalton-Hopkins Debate**

**Additional Sources:**

**April 22: Lecture 7: The collision with the slave trade**


**Additional Sources:**

**April 24: Lecture 8: The Scramble for Africa**


**April 29: Lecture 9: The collision with Colonialism: Settler Colonies**


**Additional Sources:**
Apartheid as seen from bottom up by the oppressed

**May 1: Lecture 10: The collision with Colonialism: Indirect Rule**


**Additional Thoughts:**


Colonial Igboland:


**May 6: Mid-Term**

**May 8: Lecture 11: Making and Fortifying Identities**


**Additional Thoughts:**


**May 13: Lecture 12: Post-Colonial economic consequences**


**Additional Sources:**


May 15: Lecture 13: Creating Post-Colonial Political Order


Additional Sources:
Fanon, Frantz (1963) The Wretched of the Earth,

May 20: Lecture 14: Things Fall Apart


Additional Sources:

May 22: Lecture 15: Africa and the International Community


**Additional Thoughts:**

**May 28: Memorial Day no class.**

**May 29: Lecture 16: A New Africa?**


**June 3: Lecture 17: Review.**

**June 5: Final Exam.**