HIS 115A: West African History
The History and Memory of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Introducing Myself and the Class (Tue. 1-8)
Why teach African History?

“Undergraduates, seduced, as always, by the changing breath of journalistic fashion, demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history.”


Continued with an analysis by Kwame Anthony Appiah: “I do not deny that men existed in dark countries and dark centuries, nor that they had political life and culture, interesting to sociologists and anthropologists,” he hastened to add. No, the reason that the African past had nothing to teach us was that the discipline of history had “a purpose. We study it... to discover how we have come to be where we are.” In a world entirely dominated by “European techniques, European examples, European ideas,” this high purpose could best be achieved by the study of the European past.

The German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Hegel said in the *Philosophy of History* (1837) that Africa was not a “historical continent” because it showed no development. As such, Trevor-Roper’s ideas are not new. They shaped the production of African History since the field’s inception, and they have not gone away.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Europe</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Faculty: 5</td>
<td>Number of Faculty: 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/O North Africa: 2</td>
<td>Upper Division Courses: 54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper Division courses: 7</td>
<td>Pre-1900 Upper Division Courses: 35</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Pre-1900 Courses: 1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HIS 15A: Africa to 1900</strong></td>
<td><strong>HIS 151A: England in the Middle Ages</strong></td>
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<td><strong>HIS 151B: The Early Modern Centuries</strong></td>
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<td><strong>HIS 151C: Eighteenth-Century England</strong></td>
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<td><strong>HIS 151D: Industrial England</strong></td>
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**Conclusion:** One country of Europe gets four classes for its history before 1900. By contrast, the entire continent of Africa gets only 1 class for its history before that same period.

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**Above:** These statistics were taken from the course catalog and faculty pages of a major public research University in the United States. Africa has the least number of upper-division courses among all of the groups listed: Africa, Asia, Europe, United States, Latin America, Middle East, and World.
“Contrary to what may be called entrenched popular perception and belief, the slave trade and its abolition are neglected subjects in the writing of West African history and indeed of the history of Africa as a whole...More importantly, the topic does not occupy a prominent enough place in the teaching programs of many of our colleges and universities. I have come across many history and social science graduates who know next to nothing about the slave trade in Africa and its abolition...”


Above: This article is adapted from the author's keynote address delivered at the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture’s conference "'The bloody Writing is for ever torn': Domestic and International Consequences of the First Governmental Efforts to Abolish the Atlantic Slave Trade," Aug. 8-12, 2007, Accra and Elmina, Ghana. Adiele Afigbo (1937-2009) was a Nigerian historian who studied at the University of Ibadan and taught in Nigeria for 45 years.
Above: With Dr. Ogenga Otunnu at the DePaul University History Department graduation ceremony in Chicago in 2012.

Otunnu got his PhD from York University, and he has taught at the Centre for Refugee Studies at York for 15 years. He has also taught forced migration & refugee studies at Northwestern University and DePaul University. Has traveled the world with the UN. He recently published *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda in 2 Vols. (1890-2016)*. He is an expert in human rights, forced migration, refugee studies, and African History more generally.

At DePaul University the African survey course taught by Ogenga Otunnu in WQ 2009: *HST 131: The History of Africa to 1800*

Otunnu taught me about colonial, national, and post-colonial historiography. He was the first person to teach me about West Africa and the trans-Atlantic slave trade.
Informal Scholarship: I developed a blog, The Zamani Reader (abbreviated as TZR) in February of 2014. It is named after a Swahili concept that the Kenyan-born Christian philosopher John S. Mbiti discusses in his book *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969). The blog is dedicated to showcasing my scholarship and to exploring the history of Atlantic Africa, the West Indies, and Britain in the eighteenth century.
My dissertation research is trans-Atlantic...

**Right:** Researching at the archives of the West India Committee at Clutha House in Westminster, England, in August 2017

**Left:** Researching in the archives of the Alma Jordan Library at UWI, St. Augustine, in Trinidad & Tobago in June, 2018
**Teaching:** TA’ed for both parts of the African History survey course at UC Davis with Corrie Decker (15A and 15B) and then I developed this class for the satisfaction of my minor field requirement last year (FQ, 2017). I applied to teach this course as an associate instructor in Spring of 2018. This is my first time teaching this course.

**HIS 15A is a prerequisite for this course.** This course builds off of the material presented in “HIS 15: Africa to 1900.”