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PSC 326.01: Politics of Africa

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**The University of Montana
Department of Political Science**

**PSC 326 - Politics of Africa
Fall Term 1997 - 1998**

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Course Description

This is a discussion course in which we seek understanding of the problems of economic and political (under-) development which every so often puts Africa in the headlines. The course begins by examining the nature and characteristics of African politics. It then seeks explanation in the colonial inheritance, the continuing neo-colonial political economy and the nature of the post-colonial state. For this purpose we spend a few weeks discussing European contact with Africa and its impact on social structures and institutions. The greater part of the course is devoted to the analysis and discussion of critical issues, institutions, processes and trends in the post-colonial era. In the final part of the course, we debate the current and proposed solutions to the more critical contemporary problems of economic and debt crises, human rights, structural adjustment, democratization, population, and environmental crises.

Running through the course are certain fundamental questions such as the feasibility of liberal democracy in Africa, and under what conditions? Is liberal democracy a prerequisite of development or is it the other way around? How can leadership accountability be institutionalized in Africa? Is insistence on internationally recognized human rights the answer? The dilemma such questions pose for Western policy in Africa are discussed.

The course is in four parts. In Unit One, students are introduced to Africa and to the nature and characteristics of its politics. In Unit Two we seek understanding of African politics and political life by examining the social system and social order using issues arising from the burial of a famous lawyer as a case study. In the third Unit, we examine the place of religion and occultism in the political and social life of Africans. In the final Unit, the course focusses on critical contemporary economic problems and students will debate proposed solutions.

Course Format and Requirements

The course will be organized as a discussion seminar. After the initial preliminaries, students will break into small groups and discuss key issues, concepts and themes from the assigned readings. Each group will then present the key findings to the whole class for wider discussion.

Meaningful discussion and rewarding class sessions can only occur if we all faithfully do the assigned readings when due; otherwise we would only be exchanging ignorance and have boring sessions. Everyone is therefore responsible for the material

PSC 326 - Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction

Sept. 2: Overview: scope, contents and course requirements

Sept. 4: Discussion of "The Nature of a Continent" (a Video) on Africa's Triple Heritage

Reading: Begin and try to finish by the week-end
Achebe, A Man of the people

Unit 1: Understanding the Nature and Characteristics of African Politics

Week 2:

Sept. 9: Discussion of Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People
chps 1-7

Sept. 10: Discussion of Achebe continued, chps 8-13

Week 3: Explaining the nature and characteristics of African politics: The problem of State-building

Sept. 16: The African State in Comparative Perspective - the inevitability of violence, instability and civil wars due to competing nationalisms, conflict between integration (melting pot idea), assimilation and self-determination

Sept. 18: The colonial inheritance -- autocracy and militarism as legacies of colonialism.

Week 4:

Sept. 23: The state and corruption: the role of patrimonialism and prebendalism in state-building and class-formation.

Readings - "Lancing the Swollen African State" (FacPac)
"Accumulators and Democrats" (FacPac)

Sept. 25: Discussion of "In Search of Stability" (a video)

Week 5: Is democratization the answer?

Sept. 30: The idea of fostering civil society based on indigenous associations

Readings - "Oshogbo, an Urban Community?" (FacPac)
- "Hometown Voluntary Associations" (FacPac)

Oct. 2: The idea of tying aid to democratic reforms. A debate.

Readings - The articles by Michael Johns and Carol Lancaster in the FacPac.

Unit 2. The Social System and Social Order

Unit 4: The Political Economy

Nov. 6: Africa's incorporation into the global economy

Week 11

Nov. 11: V E T E R A N S' D A Y (Holiday)

Nov. 13: Discussion of "The tools of exploitation" video

Week 12

Nov. 18: Debate: Colonialism responsible vs. colonialism not responsible for Africa's underdevelopment

Readings - Mai Palmberg, "Colonialism made Africa poor and dependent" (on reserve) and P. T. Bauer, "Colonialism is not responsible for Africa's problems" in FacPac.

Nov. 20: Current economic crisis: Perspectives on causes and solutions - the LPA vs. Berg Report.

Reading - Ch. 5 of Understanding Contemporary Africa

Week 13

Nov. 25: Is environmental protection and population control the answer?

Readings - Chps. 7 & 8 of Understanding Contemporary Africa

Week 14

Dec. 2: Is structural adjustment the answer?

Reading - Barry Riddle, "Things Fall Apart Again," in FacPac

Dec. 4: Is aid reform the answer?

Readings - USAID (chp. 3, #3: "Western Aid Reforms Can Strengthen Africa's Economies")
- Adedeji (chp. 3, #4: "Western Aid Reforms are Harming Africa's Economies) (both on reserve)

Week 15: Conclusion

Dec. 9 & Dec. 11: Opportunities and Constraints of the International Environment

Reading - Chp. 6, Understanding Contemporary Africa