

Health, Wealth and Healing in African History

Fall 2025, Fridays, period 4-6, or

10:40 AM - 1:40 PM

Keene-Flint, 0229, "the Library"

Class Dates: 8/21/25 - 12/03/25

Prof. N. Hunt | WELCOME!! | nrhunt@ufl.edu

Course numbers:

AFH 3931, Special Topics AfH

27336

Section 8NH1

OR

AFS 3930, Special Topics Afr Stu

27522

Section HHWH

HEALTH, WEALTH, & HEALING IN AFRICAN HISTORY, a set of historical investigations in African history since 1600, and especially 1850-2020, with healers, spirits, ritual, herbs, possession, pharmaceuticals, doctors, nurses, patients, epidemics, childbearing, madness, & colonial and postcolonial hospitals.



Africa's medical history often is not a pretty story, but it is a highly instructive one for thinking about Africa's health infrastructure, human resources, and needs today. This course provides a broad and intense introduction to health, medicine, and social epidemiology in Africa; it especially covers changes in healing and medicinal practices in African worlds from the fifteenth century to the present. It is also a skills-based course,

as you will see. Read on!

Aims & Objectives. This course has four aims:

- introduce students to health, healing, and medicine in Africa, (a field of interest shared by anthropologists and historians, art historians, sociologists, epidemiologists, and public health specialists)
- encourage students to think deeply and critically about health and illness in African worlds
- make our concerns concrete (with specific examples or stories), and also periodize them
- sharpen interpretive and analytical skills, by moving between concepts, primary evidence, and scholarly arguments

Africa is a big continent, and we cannot cover all of it. An effort is made to show a wide diversity of African worlds on and beyond the continent. No previous knowledge is assumed. Upon completion, students should be able to:

- explain the causes and consequences of Africa's rich therapeutic diversity
- demonstrate a strong grasp of key concepts and use them in speech and writing
- critically interpret primary historical sources, and use evidence to make an argument
- think concretely and comparatively, across different locations and time periods

The course traces three interlinked trajectories or themes. The first is about African therapeutics: ways of diagnosing and intervening in relation to illness from ancient times to the present, with attention paid to medicinal words and objects, therapeutic associations, dreams, spirit possession, public healing, and religious healing. Students will learn about how African healing traditions traveled with slaves to the Americas; how Africans often become healers; and how power objects are part of therapeutic practices.



The second is about science, disease, power, and institutions. This theme considers biomedicine, and the motivations of health and scientific workers (doctors, nurses, midwives, psychiatrists, and one psychoanalyst). We will touch on the social causes and effects of some diseases (trypanosomiasis, syphilis, kwashiorkor, AIDS, and “madness”); and the kind of institutions (scientific, international, philanthropic, humanitarian, and missionary) and states (colonial, segregationist, developmentalist, socialist, postcolonial). These institutions and states built hospitals, clinics, maternity wards, graveyards, primary health care systems, and refugee camps; engineered the layout of cities, access to drinking water, and vaccination programs; and organized medication and relief during epidemics, famines, and war. The final theme concerns borders, translation, violence, ambivalence, transgression, and not knowing. It asks about the kinds of borders that exist within and between African therapeutic worlds, spaces, or persons. It considers kinds of bleeding, mixture, and translation that developed between African

vernacular and biomedical institutions. This history was mediated by power, racialized, colonizing, and extractive processes, and violence and ambivalence. Transgression or refusal was one option. “Not knowing” was another. Learning about the concrete details of a encounters and transactions will enable students to see how they involved creativity, border-crossing, dismissal, assertion, experimentation, care, and the like.

We will go on two fieldtrips, one to the Harn, one to the Smathers.

Most classes will divide into three: (1) discuss reading; (2) collaborative exercise; (3) lecture.

Assessment, points out of 100 points total

Two FUN archival research exercises

one photographic, 20

one newspaper, 20

Weekly learning/reading logs and/or homework, 20;

Final research exercise/as an exam, 20

Attendance, 10

Participation, 10

GROUND RULES:

1. Be there. (Two excused absences a term—lecture or section).
2. Come prepared.
3. Get involved.
4. **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, PLEASE NOTE:** All students must observe norms of academic honesty. I have a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism. All work must be original: all words, phrases, and underlying ideas and concepts in papers and exams must be your own. **AVOID AI.** Ideas borrowed from anyone or anywhere else (other writers, students, the Internet, or AI technologies) must be properly cited and attributed. All quotations – even short ones – must be marked as such, and paraphrased passages acknowledged. If you have any questions about accepted practices or how to cite sources, please see me before turning in your work
5. **This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those polices and for resources for students, please see this link:**
[https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/.\)](https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/.)

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Schedule

Readings will be adjusted as needed. Readings will be on canvas or via links.

1, 22 august	<p>Introduction We will read and discuss in class:</p> <p>Primary Source: David Livingstone, <i>Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa</i> (New York, 1858), 22-33.</p> <p><i>David Livingstone: what are his most puzzling passages?</i></p>
2, 29 august	<p>Deep Time, African Therapeutics, Vigilant Things & Illness</p> <p>Callaway, traditions</p> <p>David Doris, "Symptoms and Strangeness in Yorùbá Anti-Aesthetics," <i>African Arts</i> 38, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 24-31, and 92.</p>
3, 5 september	<p>Lemba, slavery, (Obeah)</p> <p>Primary source: Janzen, Lemba texts</p> <p>Richard Sheridan, "The Guinea Surgeons on the Middle Passage: The Provision of Medical Services in the British Slave Trade," <i>IJAHS</i> 14 (1981): 601-25.</p> <p>Hunt on slave ships, in <i>Psychiatric Contours</i></p>
4, 12 september	<p>Early colonial (Schweitzer), European Optics</p> <p>Primary Source with HANDOUT and instructions: David Kerr Cross, <i>Health in Africa; a medical handbook for European travellers and residents, embracing a study of malarial fever as it is found in British Central Africa</i> (London: Nisbet, 1897). Available and keyword searchable at: http://hdl.handle.net/2027/nnc2.ark:/13960/t6b28m22k</p> <p>Steven Feierman, "Popular Control Over the Institutions of Health: A Historical Study," 205-220 in <i>The Professionalisation of African Medicine</i> (1986)</p>
5, 19 september	<p>Newspaper archive. Exercise. The Colonial</p> <p><i>Class focused on our Newspaper Project.</i> <i>Research Day: with Newspaper Assignment and presentation of search strategies and results.</i></p>
6, 16 september	<p>Colonial</p> <p>Primary Source: "Records of Maji Maji," 124-41 in <i>Eastern Africa</i>.</p> <p>Steven Feierman, "Healing as Social Criticism in the Time of Colonial Conquest," <i>African Studies</i> 54 (1995): 73-88.</p>
7, 3 october	<p>Field trip to The Harn. More vigilant things?</p> <p><i>Drums of Affliction, Trance, & Spirit Possession</i></p>

	<i>What key words produce the most illuminating results—about power & colonial situations, and about health problems?</i>
8, 10 october	Visual Archive Exercise Investigating the colonial and beyond
homecoming	No class.
9, 24 October	Colonial matters. Science and Race, Tsetse Flies and Babies Maryinez Lyons, "From 'Death Camps' to Cordon Sanitaire: The Development of Sleeping Sickness Policy in the Uele District of the Belgian Congo, 1903-1914," <i>Journal of African History</i> 26, 1 (1985): 69-91. Primary Source: T. Jesse Jones, <i>Education in East Africa: a study of East, Central and South Africa by the Second African education commission under the auspices of the Phelps-Stokes fund, in cooperation with the International education board</i> . New York: Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1925. Available and keyword searchable at: http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015005682573 . Begin by searching for: health, disease, medicine. What additional keywords yield material relevant to the themes of this course? Reproductive and Modern Intermediaries Jennifer Stanton, "Listening to the Ga: Ciceley Williams' Discovery of Kwashiorkor on the Gold Coast," pp. 149-71 in L. Conrad and A. Hardy, eds., <i>Women and Modern Medicine</i> (2001). Hunt, Le Bebe En Brousse Hunt, "Colonial Fairy Tales and the Knife and Fork Doctrine in the Heart of Africa," 143-71 in <i>African Encounters with Domesticity</i> Clare Wendland, "Moral Maps and Medical Imaginaries: Clinical Tourism at Malawi's College of Medicine," <i>American Anthropologist</i> 114 (2012): 108-122. <i>Collect evidence and account for differentials by race, distance, mortality, and care. Are there fairy tales? Ciceley Williams' figures.</i>
10, 31 October	Madness and Folly Sadovsky article <i>Primary Source:</i> Wulf Sachs, <i>Black Hamlet; The Mind of an African Negro revealed by psychoanalysis</i> (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937): cover page, TOC, 11-25, 31-40, 47-49, 77-147, 173-76. <i>Sachs: Why is a narrative of two different kinds of healers too simple?</i> Timothy Burke, "'Sunlight Soap has Changed My Life': Hygiene, Commodification, and the Body in Colonial Zimbabwe," 189-212. Rachel Jewkes et al, "Why Do Nurses Abuse Patients? Reflections from South African Obstetrics Services," <i>Social Science and Medicine</i> 47, 11 (1998): 1781-95.

11, 7 November	<p>Decolonization</p> <p>Primary Source: Frantz Fanon, "Medicine and Colonialism," 121-46 in <i>A Dying Colonialism</i> (New York, 1965). <i>What are Fanon's arguments and his evidence about colonial medicine and decolonization? What is their applicability?</i></p> <p>Steven Feierman, "Struggles for Control: The Social Roots of Health and Healing in Modern Africa," <i>African Studies Review</i> 28 (1985): 73-147; READ 73-74 AND 85-105 ONLY.</p>
12, 14 November	<p>Postcolonial Days</p> <p>War and Primary sources: childhood in Zimbabwe Amara Jambai and Carol MacCormack, "Maternal Health, War, and Religious Tradition: Authoritative Knowledge in Pujehun District, Sierra Leone," 421-40 in <i>Childbirth and Authoritative Knowledge</i> (Berkeley, 1997).</p> <p>SAPs, Precarity, and AIDS Primary Source: Body map stories of Thozama, Bongiwe, and Ntombizodwa Somlayi, 92-123 in <i>Long Life . . . Positive HIV Stories</i>, eds. Jonathan Morgan and the Bambanani Women's Group (Cape Town, 2003).</p> <p>Vinh-Kim Nguyen, "Trial Communities: HIV and Therapeutic Citizenship in West Africa," 429-44 in <i>Evidence, Ethos, and Experiment</i> (Berghahn, 2011).</p> <p>Peter Redfield, "Vital Mobility and the Humanitarian Kit." In A. Lakoff and S. Collier, eds. <i>Biosecurity Interventions: Global Health and Security in Question</i> (Columbia U Press, 2008), 147-171.</p> <p><i>Body map stories: May illness, pain, and power go together?</i> <i>What allows some patients to create an edge over struggle</i></p> <p><i>Compare and contrast spaces, persons, concepts, and make a grid.</i></p>
13, 21 November	<p>LAST CLASS, field trip to the Papa Mfumu'Eto 1er Papers, the Smathers</p> <p><i>Sorcery, and Knowing about Not Knowing</i></p> <p>Murray Last, "The Importance of Knowing about Not Knowing," 1-17 in <i>On Knowing and Not Knowing in the Anthropology of Medicine</i> (2007).</p> <p>Harry G. West, "Working the Borders to Beneficial Effect: the Not-so-Indigenous Knowledge of Not-so-traditional Healers in Northern Mozambique," 21-42 in <i>Borders and Healers: Brokering Therapeutic Resources in Southeast Africa</i> (2006).</p>

Suggested films:

Film: "ABC Africa"

Film: Thierry Michel, "Donka: X-ray of an African Hospital," 1996, 59 min.

