

Theory and Politics of African Decolonization

Dear Seminar Participant,

Thank you for enrolling in POLS 343. I am looking forward to spending the next four months with you all. My name is Professor Isaac Kamola, and I just wanted to take the opportunity to give you an overview of this class, to explain how I teach, and give some sense of what we can expect from each other.

I try to always remember that the college classroom—where we collectively have time set aside to explore complicated ideas in a collaborative fashion—is a relatively rare opportunity. At their best, the classroom creates openings to challenge ourselves with difficult and often unfamiliar and uncomfortable ideas, and to work collaboratively in developing new ways of understanding the complexity of the world, and worlds, we inhabit together. At its best, the classroom is an encounter that can prepare students to critically understand, and engage, the world in the pursuit of more just, equitable, and sustainable futures. The college classroom can be a gift, one that none of us deserve (but here we are anyway).

As a student and professor, the classroom communities I cherish most were places of shared and cooperative learning and experimentation, where our time was understood as a collective project—one that only succeeds when we all engaged the work of collective study. This required committing our time and intellects to pursuing the material at hand. These memorable classroom experiences share several characteristics.

I have found that classes are more likely to be generative and engaging when everyone comes to class having done the reading. Sometimes this means reading every word, other times it means reading as much as necessary to understand the main contexts and aspects of the arguments. Sometimes it means struggling without making heads or tails of the material. In all cases, however, spending considerable time with the reading prior to class is usually a necessary pre-requisite for a lively discussion. Since we will be engaging complicated conceptual, historical, empirical, and theoretical content, one cannot fully grapple with the material by sitting passively and listening to others.

A vibrant classroom also depends upon focused and generous discussion. Discussing a text, however, does not simply involve making casual observations. Instead, it requires first collectively working through the author(s)' main arguments (sometimes this can take the whole class period). Academic, theoretical, and political writing often entails considerable complexity. We must first fully appreciate the arguments being made before we can begin criticizing and critiquing them. In contemporary society, however, much reading remains surface-level and informational—done online, in passing, and over short stints. Reading as part of a practice of collective study, in contrast, requires first trying to understand the content and structure of the author's argument. Cultivating a vibrant class discussion also requires learning how to collectively move an idea or line of thought forward. Asking questions of each other. Building upon points made by others. It requires considerable effort and practice—which we'll work on over the course of the semester.

Because the class is organized around discussion it is necessary to have a copy of the reading (a physical copy of the book and printouts of material from Moodle). If you have trouble purchasing the texts, or making the necessary photocopies, please let me know and I can help make the necessary

arrangements. As you read for class, make sure to annotate the text—identifying key passages, noting areas of confusion, and writing any questions you might have in the margins. Having an annotated reading in class makes it much easier to hold a thoughtful and detailed discussion, and one that focuses on the specificities of the text.

This particular class studies one of the most important transformations of the twentieth century, namely the decolonization of Africa. Prior to Ghana's independence in 1957, Africa—the world's second largest, and second most populous, continent—was nearly completely divided into colonial possessions owned by European imperial powers. By 1968, a short decade later, forty African countries had become independent nations through violent and non-violent struggle, leaving only fascist Portugal—and a handful of settler states—with substantial African possessions. At the forefront of this political moment was a group of African leaders and thinkers whose work helped shape not only the trajectory of individual African countries but the world as a whole. It is my contention that one cannot fully understand contemporary world politics without appreciating the processes of African decolonization. Unfortunately, most of the brilliant poets, intellectuals, and movement leaders at the heart of this world-historic transformation are not widely read today, especially in the American academy. This semester we will address this absence by reading their work as an entrée into thinking about present-day issues of economic inequality, political violence, and human emancipation in Africa, and around the world.

The course starts with an examination of colonialism's political, economic, cultural, and epistemic legacies. We then turn to specific debates concerning how various thinkers understood the problems facing the forging of African nation-states, the creation of a postcolonial African identity, and the establishment of an independent economy.

We will be reading seven fantastic books for this class: Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* (Waveland Press, 20120), Steve Biko's *I Will Write What I Like* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), Aime Cesaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review Press, 2000), Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2004), Adom Getachew's *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton 2019), Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket 2016), and Jean-Claude Kongo and Leo Zeilig's *Thomas Sankara* (HSRC Press, 2017). Please purchase hardcopies, keeping an eye on the publisher to make sure we all have the same version. All other readings are available on the course's Moodle site.

As you know, grading is an insufficient gauge of learning, but here we are trapped in a system that requires it. I hate grading probably as much as you hate being graded. However, I really enjoy working to improve student writing. This is because learning to write is, in my estimation, the most valuable thing one can learn in college. Thinking and writing are the same process. If we can't write clearly, it is difficult to think clearly. And the process of putting ideas onto paper, so they can be understood by others, helps refine and clarify our own thinking. I often assume I understand an idea, argument, or text while mulling it over in my head or talking about it in class. However, once I put the proverbial pen to paper, I realize that my understanding is much more superficial than I had expected. Writing becomes the process of working, refining, and deepening our understanding. It is also the process by which we take authorship over our own ideas. You should always write something that you are interested in and compelled by.

As far as assignments goes, the main writing projects for this class are 5-to-6-page college essays, focusing on explaining, exploring and/or applying conceptual issues raised during the class. Two weeks prior to the due date I will hand out a set of question prompts. Students are expected to choose one question and answer it using the material read in class. The prompts are broad, with lots of room for you to organize and create an argument of your own. I am looking for papers that are interesting, creative, and attentive.

I understand that this traditional college essay is a bit of a rarified genre, and without much clear application outside the academy. I understand the college essay, however, as a form of practice or drill. One would not expect to become a competent basketball player without practicing dribbling around cones. But, then again, one does not dribble around cones during a game. Yet these drills are created to heighten one's ability and to develop specific skills. The same is true of writing assignments. Each essay offers an opportunity to practice distilling complex arguments, marshaling evidence, and making original and interesting arguments in a contained—and clearly defined—space. They are demanding and require focus. And, similarly, if you can write a good 5-to-6-page college essay you will have learned many skills that will transfer over wherever your life might lead.

As far as grading goes, if you want a clear overview of what I am looking for in written work, follow the link on Moodle or [here](#).¹ Likewise, if you are unable to turn your assignment in on time please consult my late paper policy, described on Moodle and [here](#).²

Because writing is such an important component of my classes I strongly encourage every student to make use of the Writing Center—no matter your skill level. You can find out more information by visiting: <http://writingcenter.trincoll.edu>. I also take plagiarism, and all issues of academic dishonesty, very seriously. I will fail students found responsible for academic dishonesty. Please make sure that all your writing is your own, and that you provide the proper citations. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me or those at the writing center.

As a discussion-based class, participation is another important component of the grade. My specific policy can be found on the class's Moodle site or [here](#).³ Please note, I don't distinguish between an excused and unexcused absence, either you are in class or not (read the policy for more details). Likewise, if you feel uncomfortable participating in class, please contact me and we can talk about how to make active participation more possible.

As far as the nuts and bolts of the class go: I have office hours on Wednesday from 3-5pm. Office hours are time reserved in my weekly schedule to meet with students to discuss issues pertaining to class, readings, assignments, or other topics of interest. For now, I will be available via Zoom (link available on Moodle) but am happy to meet in person outdoors as well. Feel free to log onto the Zoom meeting, swing by my office, or call (office phone number below). No appointment necessary. Likewise, if these times do not work, I'm happy to arrange a time that does. I only request that, out of courtesy, if you make an appointment, please make sure you keep it.

Email is my primary mode of communication. For my part, I will make sure to respond to your email within 24 hours during the school week, and within 48 hours over the weekend or holidays. I know there are many ways students communicate these days, including over various social media platforms. However, I expect you to stay current with email correspondence for the course and respond to my emails in a similarly timely manner. I appreciate when email correspondence is professional, and includes a salutation ("Dear Professor Kamola," for example).

As far as electronic devices go, there is now an extensive academic literature demonstrating that using laptops in the classroom is not only distracting and detracts from learning⁴ but—even when used solely for note taking—using laptops for notetaking results in a shallower understanding of the

¹ <https://commons.trincoll.edu/ikamola/assignment-grades/>

² <https://commons.trincoll.edu/ikamola/late-paper-policy/>

³ <https://commons.trincoll.edu/ikamola/isaac-kamolas-class-participation-policy/>

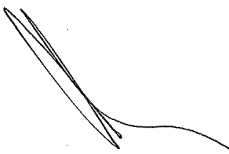
⁴ For a summary of this literature, see: Nate Kornell, "Close That Laptop in Class!" *Psychology Today* May 15, 2013. Also: Meyer, Robinson, "To Remember a Lecture Better, Take Notes by Hand," *The Atlantic*, May 1 2014.

material.⁵ This is confirmed by my own experience in which I have found that electronic devices greatly diminish the learning environment for everyone. As a result, I do not allow electronic devices in the classroom (including laptops, iPads, cell phones, e-readers, etc.). I would recommend getting a binder or notepad reserved for this class and taking notes in that. Or, when discussing a text, writing notes directly onto the hardcopy of the reading often works very well. There are, of course, exceptions to this policy; if you require a computer for personal reasons, please contact me individually. Also, please no texting in class. When I see students texting, I understand them as telling me “I don’t want to be here. I’d rather be with so-and-so.” Unless absolutely necessary, please stay in class for the full period.

If you have a documented disability and require academic accommodations, please present your accommodations letter during my office hours within the first two weeks of the semester. If you do not have a letter, but have questions about applying for academic accommodations, please contact Lori Clapis, Coordinator of Accommodation Resources, at 860-297-4025 or Lori.Clapis@trincoll.edu.

I think that’s about it for now. If you have any additional questions, comments or concerns let me know. And thank you for your interest in the course material, and your willingness to work hard and think collaboratively. I am looking forward to a challenging, thoughtful, and joyful semester with you all.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Isaac Kamola', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Isaac Kamola
Associate Professor of Political Science
Trinity College

⁵ Mueller, Pam A. and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, “The Pen is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking” *Psychological Science* (June 2014).

Theory and Politics of African Decolonization

Political Science
POLS 343

Fall 2021
Trinity College
Room #: AAC 231
11:30-12:45

Dr. Isaac Kamola
Email: ikamola@trincoll.edu
Office Phone: 860-297-4071

Office Hours: Downes Memorial, Rm. #209
Wed: 3:00-5:00
or by appointment

Assignments

Assignments

Students will be assessed on four written assignments as well as three different forms of class participation (discussion questions, leading discussion, and participation/attendance).

Three Short Papers (2 x 30% = 60% of total grade)

Students will write two 5-6 page essays focusing on conceptual issues raised during the class. Two weeks prior to the due date I will hand out a set of question prompts. Students are expected to choose one question and answer it using the material read in class.

Discussion Questions (20% of total grade)

Students will be expected to submit eight sets of discussion questions over the course of the semester [plus the assignment for Sept 13]. Students can choose any classes starting September 13 to submit questions for. Questions must be typed and handed in during class (no exceptions). Each set of questions will be graded on a ✓+ (100%), ✓/✓+ (90%), ✓ (80%), ✓/✓- (70%), ✓- (59%) scale. Please do not duplicate days for discussion questions and leading class. *No late questions will be accepted.* I cannot provide comments on discussion questions turned in after November 22.

Leading Class Discussion (5% of total grade)

Each student will sign up to lead one class period. Twenty-four hours prior to class, the class leader will email a list of discussion questions to the entire class, which will serve as the basis for class discussion. Students will be assessed on the quality of their discussion questions and how well they led discussion.

Class Participation (15% of total grade)

Details can be found on the class's Moodle site.

Weekly Reading Schedule

NOTES:

1. ** — denotes that the reading is available in the reader or on the course's Moodle site.
 2. Unmarked readings are assigned books.
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Wednesday, September 8: Introductions

- Excerpts from Baldwin's "Princes and Power."

SECTION I: AN INTRODUCTION TO COLONIALISM IN AFRICA

Monday, September 13: An Introduction to Colonialism

- **Hochschild, Adam, *King Leopold's Ghost*. Boston: Mariner Books, pp. 150-166.
- **Conrad, Joseph, *Heart of Darkness*, Robert Kimbrough, ed. New York: Norton, 1988, pp. 1-19.
- **Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), pp. 3-18.

Assignment:

- 1) Leave one question and one comment on the GoogleDoc version of the class syllabus (link on Moodle),
- 2) Write a short email introducing yourself, why you've taken the class, and what you hope to learn over the semester.

Please complete these two tasks by 9am, giving me a chance to review them.

Wednesday, September 15: Coloniality and the Construction of Difference

- **Achebe, Chinua, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" in Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Robert Kimbrough, ed. (New York & London: WW Norton, 1988).
- **Mamdani, Mahmood, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 1-21, 26-31, 43-53, 71-84.

Monday, September 20: Narratives of Colonialism

- Oyono, *Houseboy*, pp. 1-63

Wednesday, September 22: Narratives of Colonialism

- Oyono, *Houseboy*, pp. 64-122.

Monday, September 27: Decolonizing Colonial Difference

- **Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 1-33.
- Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, pp. 1-36.

SECTION II: AN INTRODUCTION TO ANTI-COLONIALISM

Wednesday, September 29: Historical Context of African Decolonization

- **Schmidt, Elizabeth, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-33.
- **Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-19, 38-65.

Monday, October 4: Bandung

- **Wright, Richard, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*. [pages TBD]
- **Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York & London: The New Press, 2007), pp. 31-50.

Wednesday, October 6: Discourse on Colonialism

- Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, pp. 7-28, 31-64 & 74-78.

Hand out Paper Topic

Monday, Oct 11: Trinity Days [No class]

Wednesday, October 13: Decolonial Feminism

- **Wynter, Sylvia, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation-An Argument," *The New Centennial Review*, 2003, 3(3), 257-337
- **Lorde, Audre, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007).
- **The Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement," in *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ed. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), pp. 15-27.

Monday, October 18: Self-Determination and Counter-Revolution

- Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, pp. 37-100.

Wednesday, October 20: Building Institutions of Freedom

- Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, pp. 100-141.

SECTION III: EPISTEMIC AND REVOLUTIONARY BLACKNESS

Monday, October 25: Race and Double Consciousness

- **Du Bois, W.E.B., “The Conservation of Races,” *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.) (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 269-274.
- **Du Bois, W.E.B., “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, David Levering Lewis, ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), pp. 28-33.
- **Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skins, White Masks*, Richard Philcox, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 2008), pp. 1-23.

Paper #1 Due

Wednesday, October 27: Negritude

- **Senghor, Léopold Sédar, “On Negrohood: Psychology of the African Negro,” *African Philosophy: Selected Readings* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), pp. 116-127.
- **Senghor, Léopold Sédar, “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century,” *Colonial Discourse/ Post-Colonial Theory*, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 27-35.
- **Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skins, White Masks*, Richard Philcox, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 2008), pp. 89-119.

Monday, November 1: Black Consciousness

- Biko, *I Write What I Like*, pp. 17-32, 40-53, 61-72, 87-119, 152-3.

Wednesday, November 3: Decolonizing the Mind

- **Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, “Introduction” and “The Language of African Literature,” *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford & Nairobi: James Currey/Heinemann, 2005), pp. 1-33.
- **Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, “Return to the Roots: Language, Culture and Politics in Kenya,” *Writers in Politics: A Re-Engagement with Issues of Literature and Society* (Oxford & Nairobi: James Currey/Heinemann, 2005), pp. 53-64.

SECTION IV: NATIONALISMS AND INTERNATIONALISMS

Monday, November 8: Violence and the Formation of the Nation

- Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 1-62.

Wednesday, November 10: The Problem of the National Bourgeoisie

- Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 97-144.

Hand out Paper Topic

Monday, November 15: Burkina Faso and Thomas Sankara

- Kongo and Zeilig, *Thomas Sankara*, pp. 3-55.

Wednesday, November 17: Burkina Faso and Thomas Sankara

- Sankara speeches in: Kongo and Zeilig, *Thomas Sankara*, pp. 59-93, 132-165.

Monday, November 22: Burkina Faso and Thomas Sankara

- **Watch: *Thomas Sankara: The Upright Man* (Shuffield, Robin, dir.), 2009.
- **Stack, Allen, "Archiving Thomas Sankara's Presence: Metamorphoses of Memory and Revolution in Burkina Faso," in *Politics of African Anticolonial Archive*, Shiera S. el-Malik and Isaac Kamola, eds. (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2017), pp. 245-269.

Thanksgiving

SECTION V: DECOLONIZING THE ECONOMY

Monday, November 29: Underdevelopment

- **Rodney, Walter, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982), pp. 3-29.
- **Gunder Frank, Andre, "The Development of Underdevelopment," *Monthly Review* 18(4), September 1966, pp. 17-31.
- **Sankara, Thomas, "A United Front Against Debt," *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-1987* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 2007), pp. 373-381.

Paper #2 Due

Wednesday, December 1: African Socialism

- **Senghor, Léopold Sédar, *On African Socialism*, Mercer Cook (trans.) (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), pp. 3-6, 67-103.
- **Nyerere, Julius, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 1-43 & 145-177.

Monday, December 6: The New International Economic Order

- Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, pp. 142-181.
- **Watch: *Bamako* (Abderrahmane Sissako, dir.), 2006.

Hand out Paper Topic

CONCLUSIONS: AFRICAN ANTICOLONIALISM TODAY?

Wednesday, December 8: Black Lives Matter

- Taylor, *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*, pp. 1-73.

Monday, December 13: Black Lives Matter

- Taylor, *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*, pp. 153-219.

****Final Paper due in my office (DM 209) at 3pm on Wednesday, December 22****