# Humanities 103

# \*FALL 2016 Syllabus

# \*Instructor: Professor Peter Chilson

**\*Office Hours: Noon-2 pm and by appointment. I am in my office nearly every day. If you want to see me it’s best to make an appointment even if it’s during my office hours.**

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**REQUIRED TEXTS**

--*THE HERO WITH AN AFRICAN FACE: MYTHIC WISDOM OF TRADITIONAL AFRICA*, by Clyde W. Ford.  Bantam publishers

--*SOUNDIATA: AN EPIC OF OLD MALI*, by Djeli Momadou Kouyaté, translated by DT Niane. Pearson publishers, revised edition (August 17, 2006)

--*THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE*(Optional), by Strunk and White

**THE COURSE**

One spring day in the year 1235, near the headwaters of the Niger River in West Africa, a young warrior named Soundiata Keita led an army of hundreds of archers and horsemen against a superior foe. This was the warrior king Sumanguru, a man whose lust for power and abuse of sorcery made him feared and hated among the many tribes who lived, farmed and fished in the great bend of the river. Soundiata, who was barely 15, is said to have been riding a white horse at full gallop straight into Sumanguru’s army, a terrifying force of tens of thousands of horsemen, archers, and infantry armed with swords and spears. Soundiata rode as if he alone would vanquish them all. Horse still at full tilt, he drew his bow and launched an arrow at the emperor, who was surveying the battle from a grassy ridge atop his horse, flanked by his generals. The arrow sailed over Sumanguru’s army, a distance of about a mile, and pierced Sumanguru’s right shoulder, the one vulnerable part of his body, disabling the arm and hand that carried the power to raise vast armies from the spirits of the dead. Within moments most of Sumanguru’s soldiers vanished and his flesh and blood warriors fled the field under clouds of of arrows launched by Soundiata’s own archers. Sumanguru fell from his horse and bled to death before he could flee. A few days later Soundiata held a council of the twelve tribes who had allied themselves with Soundiata to help him defeat Sumanguru and his army. From that meeting a grand federation was born, the Empire of Mali, perhaps the wealthiest, most powerful entity to rule any part of Africa before the European slave trade and before Europe carved Africa into colonies.

The Empire of Mali collapsed around 1550, but its legacy lives on powerfully in the legend of Soundiata Keita. Soundiata’s story to this day informs the way many West Africans see themselves, and it has come to define the identity of one country. The present day Republic of Mali, about a third the size of the former empire, regards the legend as critical to its national identity. Mali’s president, a member of the Keita clan, claims to be a descendant of Soundiata himself.

If we look at mythology and its role in defining human culture, Soundiata’s legacy is not surprising. Some central mythology helps define every single culture and country on the planet, from the great heroes and gods of Greek mythology at the center of European culture, to the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table of British culture, to the Chrysanthemum Throne of Japan that still reigns today, to the myth of Manifest Destiny that fueled the territorial growth of the United States. And, can anyone explain this whole zombie thing? Are comic book heroes like Superman and the Fantastic Four silly entertainment fare, or is there something serious going on? Many of these myths are a chemistry of fact and the fantastic. And some are, well, just myths. But the myths, even if untrue, originate somewhere for a reason.

We know Soundiata was a real person. But what about the story of that arrow and the defeat of Sumanguru? Where does that come from? We will explore the source material for his and other mythologies to help us understand something about the people of sub-Saharan Africa, a region of some 800 million people and nearly a thousand languages. We will also study the cult of Ogun, one of the most powerful gods in Yoruba culture, and the Fulani child queen Sarraounia who, in 1899, is said to have used sorcery to crush a French invasion in what is now modern day Niger and Chad. We will also study the royal mythology of Ethiopia, in East Africa, which ended with the emperor Haile Selassie, the so-called Lion of Judea, whose story launched the Rastafarian religious movement.

This course explores mythology in four sub-Saharan African countries: Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, touching on a dozen other countries as well. We will study mythology through literature, some scholarly theoretical reading, and through film. Almost everything we will read or see is material by African and African American writers, scholars, and filmmakers. With the help of this material, we will work together to understand the importance and origins of these mythologies. By the end of the course, I hope the study of sub-Saharan Africa’s mythological history will give you a better sense of what the continent was like before Europeans set foot there, and how Africa sees itself today. I also hope you’ll better understand the role mythology plays in the fabric of all humanity.

**PAPERS and ASSIGNMENTS**

**1.** Class participation 25 percent. This includes in-class exercises, group exercises, and your participatory dialogue in class.

**2.** Weekly 2-page Reports: 15 percent. There are 11 of these Reports. I repeat, there are eleven of these Reports and each Report is no more than two pages. For most of them, I require at least one primary source and two secondary sources.

**3.** First Paper—4-5 pages. 15%. Choose an example of African mythology we have not discussed much in class, if at all. Using at least two primary sources and three secondary sources, briefly discuss this myth’s origins and history and its importance to the culture and/or country that claims it.

**4.** Second Paper—2o percent. This paper is 4-5 pages and is essentially an early draft of your Final Project—and it will be graded. Of course, the paper’s subject matter must be connected to the mythologies we are studying, but the topic and focus are up to you! This paper is designed to get you started on the research and writing of your Final Project.

**5.** Final Project, 8-10 page research paper—25 percent. This project includes the paper and a 6-minute presentation. The presentations are scheduled for the last three, possibly four, class meetings in December. The paper requires at least two primary sources and three secondary sources.

**COURSE POLICIES**:

ALL REPORTS AND PAPERS MUST BE TYPED (rough drafts excepted). Final drafts should be double-spaced with margins and font size identical to what you see on this syllabus. The font, by the way, is 12 pt.

LATE PAPERS: Late papers will receive an automatic C and be graded down from there. The grade will fall one full letter grade for every other day it is late.

**ATTENDANCE:** If you don't attend, you give me less information upon which to base your grade. This course is heavily dependent on student participation and community building. For this reason, I do not allow absences. If you must be absent from class, you must send me an email explanation and request permission to be absent. **I ALLOW ONLY TWO SUCH PERMISSIONS PER STUDENT. For each unexcused absence you lose a full letter off your final grade.** Continued absences make it more difficult for you to participate and your presence becomes a negative weight in the classroom. Chronic absenteeism also proves the student’s lack of commitment to the course. This course should be a lot of fun, but without your cooperation and participation it will be a real drag. So don't hesitate to offer your views in class.

**Lateness:** Students more than five minutes late will be counted absent.

**Attendance Note:** *Understand that I cannot grade you on the quality of your excuses for missing class. I can only grade the quality of your class participation and the quality of your written work. If you come down with a terrible disease or break every bone in your body and have to miss a great many classes, I will simply ask you to drop the course. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO TURN IN THE WORK. YOU MUST ALSO ATTEND CLASS AND SHOW THAT YOU ARE INTELLECTUALLY ENGAGED!*

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the act of taking someone else’s words and/or ideas and passing them off as your own without giving due credit. This **is theft.** I am a professional writer. The thought of someone taking my hard work and putting his or her name on it deeply angers me. This is why I consider plagiarism a criminal act. Commit this crime in my class and two things will happen: First, I’ll fail you for the class. Second, I will refer your case to the Department of English and the Office of Student Affairs for further disciplinary action.

**In-Class Technology: Mine is a NO-TECHNOLOGY classroom. Keep your cell phones and computers off your desks!**

# Note on Weekly Schedule and the Syllabus overall*: I reserve the right to change the syllabus to fit the class needs.*

**\*\*Weekly Schedule: Please consider this a rough guide. The pace of our reading almost never works in concert with the daily syllabus. Every class is different and I adjust the pace of the syllabus as I go.**

**\*\*\*I WILL NOT DISCUSS YOUR GRADES WITH YOU. SUCH A DISCUSSION IS A FUTILE EXERCISE THAT DISTRACTS FROM THE REAL ISSUE, WHICH IS THE QUALITY OF YOUR WORK IN THE CLASS. THAT SAID, I AM ALWAYS HAPPY TO DISCUSS YOUR WORK. BUT PLEASE DO NOT ASK ME ABOUT YOUR GRADES.**

**\*\*\*\*\*ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT AS WRITERS AND SCHOLARS WE OFTEN DEAL WITH DIFFICULT ISSUES. THIS IS PART OF OUR JOB—TO EXPLORE DEEPLY AND ASK DIFFICULT QUESTIONS. WE WILL DEAL WITH UNCOMFORTABLE ISSUES, INCLUDING CONTROVERSIAL SITUATIONS DEALING WITH RACE AND GENDER. I RUN AN OPEN INTELLECTUAL ENVIRONMENT. THIS MEANS THAT IN CLASS WE DISCUSS THE FULL SPECTRUM OF ISSUES.**

**\*\*\*\*\*BRING THE ASSIGNED READING TO CLASS EVERY SINGLE DAY. THIS IS MANDATORY. IF YOU ARE PRESENT IN CLASS WITHOUT THE READING, I HAVE TO ASSUME YOU HAVE NOT DONE THE READING AND I WILL ASK YOU TO LEAVE.**

***!!!! WSU policy effective August 24, 2015: I will ONLY be able to respond to emails sent from your WSU email address.  I will NOT be able to respond to emails sent from your personal email address as of the first day of fall semester.  Effective the 24th, the IT Department will switch the “preferred” email address in your myWSU to your WSU email address.***

***----Soundiata: The Warrior Superhero, Founder of the Empire of Mali (Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Cote d’Ivoire)***

**Tuesday, August 23**: Class opens with a required 20-minute timed writing exercise.

This is a “lecture” course but that does not mean I will be doing all the talking. IN FACT, THIS IS AN INTERACTIVE, DISCUSSION ORIENTED COURSE, WHICH MEANS YOU THE STUDENTS GENERATE MUCH OF THE DAILY CONTENT WITH YOUR THOUGHTS, YOUR IDEAS. We’ll begin with an introduction to the course and the notion of mythology in general, and African mythology in particular. But I will want to know what “mythology” means to all of you. We will review the readings, the assignments, course policies, and the Final Project due at the end of the semester.

Read: *Soundiata*: *An Epic of Old Mali*. Read the entire book by Tuesday Aug. 30. Assigned reading in Ford text. Reading handout on the griot tradition.

**Aug. 25:** Group exercise. ***Discussion of first Report 1 and use of Primary Sources and Secondary Sources*. *For report 1, write a two-page definition of the term “mythology.” Use at least one primary source and two secondary sources.***

Discussion of *Soundiata* and the griot tradition in African history and mythology. We will also look at the important role of music in mythology and its importance to Malian culture.

Read: Assigned chapter in Ford text. For *Report 1, due in the next class—In your own words, retell the story of Soundiata’s birth. Use at least one primary source and two secondary sources.*

**Aug. 30: *Report 1 Due.***

**Lecture and discussion on the griot tradition. Discussion of underlying themes in *Soundiata.***We will also look at the geography of the mythologies we will study for this class—a look at West, Central, and East Africa. Read: Assigned chapter in Ford text.

**Sept. 1:** Lecture and discussion on the sources of the Soundiata myth. We will focus on the griot tradition in African culture. In-class writing exercise.

***For Report 2, due in the next class—In your own words, what is a griot and do you see the presence of griots working in our own modern American culture?***

Reading: You should be close to finished with the Soundiata epic. Read assigned chapter in Ford text.

**Sept. 6: *Report 2 Due.*** In-class writing/editing exercise.

**Sept. 8**. Film: *Yeelen*. Take notes during the film.

***Report 3, which is due Sept. 15, is a two-page review/analysis of Yeelen*. *For this report, focus on what you believe to be the central conflict explored in the film. Cite specific scenes and characters to support your point. Quote from the dialogue or paraphrase if you do not recall the dialogue word for word. The film is your primary source. No other sources are needed for this report.***

**Sept 13:** Discussion of the film, *Yeelen*. Can we see the values of the film reflected in a modern context or the way we imagine our own lives? ***Use what we talk about during the discussion to help you write Report 3.***

***----Myth and Religion in Nigeria: The Case of Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, of the hunt, of transition, and of war. (Yorubaland, southwest Nigeria)***

**Sept. 15:** ***Report 3 Due*.** Handouts for discussion of the deity Ogun in Yoruba culture of southwestern Nigeria. ***For Report 4, Sept 27, explain at least two of Ogun’s principal responsibilities as a Yoruba deity.* *Use at least one primary source and two secondary sources.* Group exercise.** Read assigned chapter in Ford.

**Sept. 20:** In-class writing and editing exercise for Paper One, which is due in the next class. We will also discuss Ogun’s cultural legacy based on handouts by the writer Wole Soyinka. Soyinka won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986 and has publically claimed Ogun as his personal deity.

Reading: Handouts and Assigned chapter in Ford.

**Sept. 22:** Paper One Due: 4-5 Pages. In-class exercise connected to Report 4.

Reading: Handouts and Assigned chapter in Ford

**Sept. 27: Group exercise.** Lecture/Discussion: ***For Report 4, Due October 4, explain at least two of Ogun’s principal responsibilities as a Yoruba deity.* *Use at least one primary source and two secondary sources.* Group** Why Ogun remains a relevant deity in Yoruba culture today.

**Sept. 29.** Today I will outline Paper Two, which is due Oct. 25, and the Final Project, which is due the last day of class. For Paper Two, 4-5 pages, you will propose the topic, the argument and stylistic approach (first or third person, personal essay or scholarly paper) you will take for you Final Project.

The Final Project is a research paper, but you have some stylistic flexibility. You have the option of writing in the first or third person, depending on your relationship to the subject you choose. Whether you write the project in first or third person, the project requires at least two primary sources and three secondary sources.

Reading: Handouts and assigned chapter in Ford.

**October 4: Report #4 Due.** Here the class moves from pre-colonial culture of Sub-Saharan Africa into the period in which Africa clashed European colonial forces, in this case the French. Sarraounia was a 19th century female ruler of the Hausa ethnic group. She resisted both Muslim and French colonial rule. According to legend, she defeated a major French expedition in battle by using sorcery. Overview of the story of Sarraounia and political controversy surrounding the 1986 film, which was suppressed in France.

***Report 5, which is due October 11: Write a short personal essay that explores a situation you have encountered in your reading or life experience where you have observed mythology as a response to a specific crisis. Have you observed this in film, in literature, or in your own family? This is based on your own experience. Primary and secondary sources are optional for this Report.***

Group exercise.

Reading: Handouts and Assigned chapter in Ford.

**Oct. 6:** Brief Review of Paper Two requirements in preparation for the next class period. Reading: Handouts.

***----Sarraounia: The Hausa Warrior Queen (Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Burkina Faso)***

**Oct. 11:** Review of Paper Two requirements and Final Project*.* Report # 5 Due. Lecture and discussion on colonial expansion and Africa’s response: The reality and mythology of resisting colonialism.

***Report 6, which is due in the next class period: Write two pages on a modern-day feminist mythology that may or may not be like Sarraounia*. *Use at least one primary source and two secondary sources.***

Reading: Handouts and assigned chapter in Ford.

**Oct. 13: *Report 6 Due*.** Wrap up of reading and discussion for the mythology of Sarraounia.

**Oct. 18:** Peer Review workshop for Paper Two. Editing/Writing exercise.

***Report 7, which is due in the next class period: Write a two-page paper on the history of Timbuktu. Use at least one primary source and two secondary sources.***

**Oct. 20:** ***Report 7 Due*.** Film: *Timbuktu.* This film is not about the legend of Sarraounia, but it is a story about, among other things, the clash between politics and mythology and competing ideas of religious faith. These themes are also at the center of the Sarraounia myth. The film Timbuktu takes us into a conflict unfolding in Africa today. This film will aso set us up for the next unit, which will take us to Ethiopia.

I will have reading handouts.

***Report 8, which is due in the next class period: In two pages, define the term “Rastafari.” Use at least one primary source, and two secondary sources.***

**Oct. 25:** Discussion of film, *Timbuktu.* Report # 8 Due.

**----Mythology and reality in the story of Haile Selassie: The Lion of Judah (Ethiopia)**

**Oct. 27:** Introduction to the history and theology of Haile Selassie, the late emperor of Ethiopia. Reading Handouts. Reading assignment in Ford text.

**November 1: *Report 8 Due.*****Paper Two Due, 4-5 pages.**

*Discussion of readings on the story of Haile Selassie and the Rastafari movement. Discussion of annotated bibliography for Final Project.* ***Remember—Your final project must have at least two primary sources and three secondary sources.***

*Reading handout for the annotated bibliography.* Read assigned chapter in Ford.

**Nov. 3:** Writing and Editing exercise today.

***Report 9, which is due in the next class period: Write two pages comparing and contrasting what you see as myth and what you see as reality in the history of Haile Selassie. Use at least one primary source and two secondary sources.***

**Nov. 8: *Report 9 Due.*** Lecture/Discussion on Haile Selassie and the Rastafari movement. I am hoping to have a short documentary film to go with this.

**Nov. 10: *Report 10, which is due in the next class period: Write a two-page paper on the role music plays in the Rastafari Movement.***

**Nov. 15**: ***Report 10 Due.***

And now for***Report 11, which is due Nov. 29, right after Thanksgiving Break: Write a two-page annotated bibliography of the sources you will be using for your final project.******Remember—Your final project must have at least two primary sources and three secondary sources.***

**Nov. 17:** Peer Workshop.

**Nov. 21-25 THANKSGIVING BREAK!**

**Nov. 29:** Peer Workshop—Editing exercises. ***Report 11 Due.***

**December 1:** Presentations

**Dec. 6:** Presentations

**Dec. 8:** Presentations

**December 12:** **This is a Monday. Final Project Papers DUE!! Leave them in the box outside my office, 367 Avery Hall.**