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HISTORY DEPARTMENT
THE HISTORY OF POPULAR CULTURE IN AFRICA

PROJECT SUMMARY

This project creates a new course within the department of history that focuses on the development of African popular culture forms and their connections with local and global processes of cultural production and consumption. The History of Popular Culture in Africa is a trans-national, multicultural course that traces the development of popular culture genres in Africa since the late 19th century, a history that uncover popular culture forms that both reflected and acted upon their contemporary political, economic, and social environment. In Africa, the production of popular culture is a uniquely urban phenomenon that has relied on the incorporation of local and global cultural elements from the African continent, as well as from Europe, the United States, the Caribbean, and Brazil. A study of popular culture, therefore, provides an insightful look into the core values of dynamic generations of urban Africans from the late 19th century, when the first African American minstrel groups traveled to South Africa, to the ubiquitous and diverse African Hip Hop cultures of today. An important goal in teaching themes related to global cultures is not just to impart the knowledge of other places and peoples but also to get students to see issues of cultural production and consumption from perspectives other than their own. What better way to accomplish this than to engage students in a discussion of popular culture, particularly popular culture forms that rely on increasingly global political, technological, and economic structures infused into local urban communities? The study of popular culture in the context of history allows for innovative teaching methods that actively engage students in the course materials and create new outlets for creative and critical thinking.