Africa & the Middle East

The African history component of our program focuses on sub-Saharan Africa from approximately 1500 to the present and is mainly designed as a secondary field of graduate study. In the past, graduate students in U.S. and European history (often with interests in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and European colonialism) have done exam fields in African history with an eye towards gaining a non-"Western" teaching competency.

Through seminars, independent studies, and serving as teaching assistants for the department's introductory survey courses in African history, graduate students can develop critical knowledge of precolonial states and societies; religious movements that blended existing beliefs with those of Islam and Christianity; slavery and the trans-Saharan, trans-Atlantic, and Indian Ocean slave trades; European colonialism and its far-reaching consequences; anti-colonial resistance and nationalist politics; and the ongoing challenges of the postcolonial present.

African history complements and links to the comparative history fields of ethnicity and nationalism, colonialism, and gender that engage the research interests of many department faculty. Graduate study in African history is also supported by the African Studies Program in the Jackson School of International Studies, and faculty with Africa-related interests in the departments of American Ethnic Studies, Anthropology, Art History, Ethnomusicology, French and Italian, Geography, English, and Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies. The University of Washington regularly offers courses in the Africa-relevant languages of Arabic, German, Italian, French, Portuguese, and Swahili.

Studies in the Middle East explore the diverse cultural, social, political, economic and material history of a geographic area stretching from North Africa in the West to Iran in the East, from approximately 600 CE to the present. Professor Walker, who specializes in the Ancient and Late Antique Near East, offers a field in early Islamic history. Arbella Bet-Shlimon offers fields in modern Middle Eastern history (19th century to the present) and comparative colonialisms in the modern Middle East.

Associated Faculty

Arbella Bet-Shlimon
Associate Professor

Liora Halperin
Associate Professor, Joint Appointment: Jackson School of International Studies, Rebecca and Jack Benaroya Chair in Israel Studies
Devin E. Naar
Associate Professor, Isaac Alhadeff Professor of Sephardic Studies, Sephardic Studies Program Chair, Joint Appointment: Jackson School of International Studies

Stephanie Smallwood
Associate Professor, Joint Appointment: Department of Comparative History of Ideas

Lynn M. Thomas
Professor, Floyd U. Jones Family Endowed Chair, Interim Executive Director, School of Drama

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Associate Professor, Lawrence J. Roseman Endowed Professorship in History

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