In 2001, Africanist art historian Okwui Enwezor organized a groundbreaking exhibition entitled *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945 – 1994*. In the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue, Enwezor carefully selected documents from cultural and political realms to investigate periods of African history specifically related to independence and liberation movements across the continent. He combined various archival sources -- including fine arts, political posters, cloth, photography, and architecture -- with non-visual forms of expression, such as literature, manifestos, and political documents, to tell these compelling stories. Together, these form what he calls a “critical biography” of Africa.

Using Enwezor’s exhibition as a model, your major – and final – project for the semester will be to create your own critical biography of Africa. You will design, curate, and write about a virtual exhibition related to the broad topic of “art and liberation” using a new scholarly resource called Aluka. Aluka is a digital library of resources from and about Africa. It contains documents that are quite similar to those that Enwezor used in *The Short Century*. For the purposes of our project, we will focus on Aluka’s holdings related to “Struggles for Freedom in Southern Africa”. The resources include a plethora of documents related to African-led liberation struggles – archival materials, periodicals, oral histories, books, photographs, posters, ephemeral arts, etc. etc.

In order to accomplish this task, the class will be divided up into 5 curatorial terms with 5-6 people on each team. Once you familiarize yourselves with the catalogue from *The Short Century* and the holdings of the Aluka visual database, your team will select a theme that relates to “art and liberation” and you will organize your exhibition around this theme. Although your theme is completely up to you, I offer some suggestions below. You can also refer to the list of topics provided on Aluka page titled “About Struggles for Freedom in Southern Africa Data” ([http://www.aluka.org/page/about/strugglesData.jsp](http://www.aluka.org/page/about/strugglesData.jsp)). Your theme will serve as the organizing principle for your exhibition, and you will select documents and images from the Aluka database to explore, illustrate, and educate an imaginary audience (and the class) about your “critical biography”.

Once you have decided on your theme, you will want to craft an exhibition by selecting documents around two main conceptual components:

1. politics/ideology/ethics
2. culture: artistic and literary production

Your curatorial team will need to figure out how to pull these documents together to tell a particular story.

You will also get the chance to explain and write about this story through crafting text as one would if organizing a professional exhibition. This will also require you to do some research outside of the course readings. Your text will consist of an introduction – similar in tone and in length to the introduction of an exhibition catalogue, or the introductory text to an exhibition space. Your introduction will introduce your audience to the topic and historical moment that your story comes from. You will explain your theme and its relevance, and argue the importance of your exhibition. You should also write explanatory text that conveys the importance of the documents and images on display. After the introduction, your text should guide a reader/viewer
through your “exhibition”. In your writing, you should demonstrate that you have thought critically and deeply about X. As always, your writing should be articulate, thoughtful, and well organized.

You will also need a title and bibliography.

Because this is a virtual exhibition, your final product will be presented in the form of a wiki, which is a collaborative website. The wiki will allow you to compose and present text for the exhibition interspersed with links to historical documents and visual images found on Aluka. We will devote a considerable amount of class time strategizing about your exhibitions, and learning technical skills like building the wiki, and familiarizing ourselves with Aluka.

In the last weeks of the semester, each curatorial team will present your exhibition to the class in the form of a multimedia presentation.

**Project timeline:**
Thursday, September 27: Read through and familiarize yourself with Aluka website and database, and *The Short Century* exhibition catalogue.
   Brainstorm at least 3 possible issues to focus your exhibition on

Thursday, September 20: Form curatorial teams. Familiarize yourselves with Aluka and select a preliminary topic/theme. Begin research with your team, and work to develop an initial bibliography, a document or two from Aluka to work with, and a bit of background research for your topic

Thursday October 18: Email a one paragraph description of your topic to Elliot Brandow, our library liaison ([brandow_elliot@wheatonma.edu](mailto:brandow_elliot@wheatonma.edu)) in preparation for next week’s meeting.

Thursday, October 25: Class meets at library for presentation by our class library liaison Elliot Brandow. Elliot will teach us how to use a wiki (and what IS a wiki!), and will help us get started. He will also provide an in depth introduction to Aluka and how we can use it.

Tuesday November 27, Thursday November 29, and Tuesday December 4: In-class presentation of topics

**Possible Topics:**
Black consciousness
Heroic individuals
Political imagery
Censorship
Workers rights
Women’s activism or women’s issues
Cultural activism
Prisoners
Portraiture
Non violence
Arts activism
Magazines, film (or other forms of popular culture)
Documentary photography/photographers
Newspapers and journalists – role in the struggle
Anti-apartheid icons
Human rights violations
Torture
Children/youth activism or rights
Divestment and/or other forms of economic action
Multi-national corporations