COURSE DESCRIPTION: South Africa’s history was filled with sweeping drama, even before the mineral discoveries that revolutionized society at the end of the 19th century. We will look at some of those earlier dramas: the troubled relationship between early Dutch settlers and their pastoralist neighbors, which alternated between commerce, intimacy, and genocide; the so-called mfecane of the early 19th century, when African political and military innovations supposedly led to a wave of war and insecurity; the clash of expanding frontiers, African and European, that resulted in intellectual exchange, violence, and mass religious visions. Too often, however, these stories have been shaped by the perspective of the modern experience of racial segregation and apartheid, as if what happened in the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries was determined by what came after. One of our tasks will be to consider the dangers of imposing grand narratives on events of the past. In the South African case, we will find, such narratives often rest on anachronistic concepts of nation, race, and tribe.

AREA OF CONCENTRATION: Africa/Middle East, Global

TEACHING METHOD: Lecture and discussion sections

EVALUATION METHOD: Two short midterm papers, final exam, participation in mandatory discussion sections

GRADING BASIS: Student option

TENTATIVE READING LIST:
Plus selected articles, book chapters, and primary documents, in a photocopied course packet.

NOTES: Use of laptop computers and other electronic devices will be prohibited in class except by special permission

INSTRUCTOR PROFILE: Jonathon Glassman writes and teaches primarily about 19th and 20th century Africa, comparative race and slavery, and the intersections between crime and social protest. His most recent book, on racial thought and violence in colonial Zanzibar (Tanzania), won the American Historical Association’s Klein Prize for the year’s best book on African history. Among his other awards, he has been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and two Fulbright Grants for study in Tanzania.