

NEWS RELEASE
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UMass Amherst Economics Professor Questions What Plato Would Say about Africa's Odious Debts

AMHERST, Mass. - On Wednesday, October 3 at 7:30 p.m. in the UMass Amherst Campus Center Auditorium, Léonce Ndikumana opens the Commonwealth Honors College Faculty Lecture Series for the semester with his talk "**What Would Plato Say about Africa's Odious Debts?**" Ndikumana serves as the Andrew Glyn Professor of Economics and director of the African development policy program at the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the university.

Portrayed as heavily dependent on the rest of the world and a burden on Western tax payers, the African continent is actually a net creditor, Ndikumana says. His research, co-authored with James Boyce also of PERI and the UMass economics department, shows that Africa's wealth worldwide exceeds its foreign liabilities or external debts. While these assets are in the hands of private Africans, says Ndikumana, the liabilities are public and rest on the shoulders of the African people.

He estimates that over half of the money borrowed every year is siphoned from Africa as capital flight. "These debts that never benefited the people and were pocketed by the rulers, with the complicity of their bankers, are odious," Ndikumana says.

Greek philosopher Plato envisioned a well-governed state that is meant to represent, advance, and defend the interest of the people, says Ndikumana. Government, he interprets, is supposed to borrow only to finance economic and social development. "It is clear," he says, "that [in Africa] where over half of borrowed funds cycles back out as private wealth, [the continent] would not pass Plato's litmus test of a perfect state."

In his talk, Ndikumana explores how these odious debts arise from governmental failure and dysfunctional leadership, creating what he considers a "severe form of social injustice." He probes why social injustice prevails and what can be done for lasting change in the interest of the African people and the broader global community.

Léonce Ndikumana has served as director of operational policies and director of research at the African Development Bank and chief of macroeconomic analysis at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). He is also an honorary professor of economics at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa.

Ndikumana has contributed to various areas of research and policy analysis on African countries, including external debt and capital flight, financial markets and growth, macroeconomic policies for growth and employment, and the economics of conflict and civil wars in Africa. He is co-author of *Africa's Odious Debt: How Foreign Loans and Capital Flight Bled a Continent*, in addition to dozens of academic articles and book chapters. He is a graduate of the University of Burundi and received his doctorate from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

Commonwealth Honors College introduced its Faculty Lecture Series during the spring 2011 semester in recognition of university faculty who have made significant contributions to research or creative activity. Through lectures that highlight academic excellence and scholarship, these faculty share their ideas and insight with honors students in sessions open to the campus community.

Many of the talks in the faculty lecture series relate to themes in "Ideas that Changed the World," the Honors Seminar in which honors students examine books and other works that have profoundly shaped the world we live in. The texts in this class and the related faculty lectures are meant to be exemplary for students who have the potential themselves to achieve outstanding things.

This semester's series continues with two additional lectures:

Sheila Patek, Assistant Professor, Biology

November 7, 6:30 p.m., Student Union Ballroom

Sabina Murray, Professor, English

November 26, 6:30 p.m., Campus Center Auditorium

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