

**COMN 3705: Psychology of Communication\***  
**\*Special Summer 2014 Focus:**  
**African American Oral Communication Traditions**  
**and Their West African Cultural Roots**

Pre-Travel Face-to-Face Class Meeting Dates - Chambers Center (Fridays, 6:00 – 9:00 pm)

June 20<sup>th</sup>

June 27<sup>th</sup>

July 18<sup>th</sup>

August 1<sup>st</sup>

August 15<sup>th</sup>

Ghana Travel: August 17<sup>th</sup> – August 27<sup>th</sup>

Potluck Celebration/Debriefing, Prof. Jones' Home: Wednesday, Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6:30 – 8:30 pm

Instructor:

**Arthur C. Jones, Ph.D.**, *Clinical Professor and Associate Dean for Inclusive Excellence*

*Office: Chambers Center, Inclusive Excellence Suite (Room 220)*

*Office Phone: 303-871-3795*

*Mobile Phone (best way to reach me by phone): 303-638-4978*

*E-mail: [Arthur.Jones@du.edu](mailto:Arthur.Jones@du.edu)*

*Web: <https://portfolio.du.edu/arjones>*

*Office Hours: By appointment, easily scheduled by phone or email, or in person*

Course Consultant and Co-Facilitator During Ghana Excursion: **Ebenezer Narh Yebuah, M.Th., Ph.D.** is a native Ghanaian. He is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary and the Joint University of Denver/Iliff School of Theology Ph.D. program in Religion and Psychological Studies. Dr. Yebuah is currently Director of Christian Education at Peoples Presbyterian Church in Northeast Denver and has recently accepted a new job as Senior Pastor of Kennedy Heights Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. He will travel from Cincinnati to join us for our Ghana excursion.

Course Description: This course will introduce students to various ways in which fundamental aspects of oral expression and communication in African American communities have contributed to the ability of individuals and families in those communities to survive, resist and transcend experiences of prejudice, discrimination and oppression.

Students will explore -- through readings, lectures, discussions, film clips, and oral recordings -- robust elements of West African culture that were fundamental to the evolution of oral communication survival strategies among African American slaves and their descendants, reflected in oral music genres like the spirituals, the blues, gospel songs, and rap music, as well as in storytelling, preaching, slam poetry and competitive verbal games like “the dozens.” Students will also examine ways in which African American oral communication traditions have had significant influences on American culture at large.

**At the end of the course (during the Fall 2014 Interterm period), students will travel to the West African country of Ghana),** where they will deepen their understanding of the issues explored in the course, through visits to some of the geographical sites of the Atlantic slave trade and exposure to the work of Ghanaian musicians and storytellers.

**There will be five face-to-face class sessions during Summer Quarter, followed by the ten-day excursion to Ghana. After returning to Denver there will be one final face-to-face class potluck celebration/debriefing session at the home of Prof. Jones.**

Course Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- 1) demonstrate a critical understanding of the cultural continuities that appear to connect West African cultural sensibilities and various African American oral traditions, including oral music genres, storytelling, preaching, slam poetry, and competitive verbal games like “the dozens.”
- 2) demonstrate a critical understanding of the complex ways in which African American oral communication traditions have functioned psychologically in response to individual and communal experiences of trauma, beginning with the commodification of humans during the Atlantic slave trade and continuing through systemic patterns of racism and discrimination in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
- 3) develop a framework for understanding how the specific oral communication traditions that have evolved among African Americans might serve as a prototype for understanding the universal human drive for survival and resilience in the face of persistent experiences of oppression.

### **Laptop Use in the Classroom**

In order to create and maintain an optimal learning environment in the classroom, students should use laptops appropriately as needed for the purposes of the course. Work done on laptops that is not relevant to the class can hinder the process of communication and shared discussion of ideas that require full engagement by all participants. Such distractions can build barriers to that sense of physical and intellectual community so important in CWC classes.

### **Academic Integrity**

Colorado Women's College fully endorses the University of Denver's Honor Code and the procedures put forth by the Office of Citizenship and Community Standards. Academic dishonesty—including plagiarism, cheating, and falsification of data and research—is in violation of the code and will result in a failing grade for the assignment or for the course.

As student members of a community committed to academic integrity and honesty, it is your responsibility to become familiar with the DU Honor Code and its procedures ([www.du.edu/honorcode](http://www.du.edu/honorcode)).

### **Observing Religious Holidays**

Students wishing to observe a religious holiday not celebrated on the academic calendar may do so provided advanced notice is given the instructor during the first two weeks of the quarter. With advanced notice, the absence will be considered an excused absence. For additional information, contact DU's Center for Religious Services (<http://www.du.edu/crs/>).

### **Support for Students with Special Needs**

**As soon as possible, students who have learning disabilities or other learning challenges should make an appointment to see Prof. Jones.** Every effort will be made to accommodate individual student needs. This is especially important for students who require accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Failure to notify the instructor immediately may hinder the College's ability to accommodate accordingly. Students with learning disabilities should also contact the University Disability Services Program at <http://www.du.edu/studentlife/disability/>. University Disability Services houses the Learning Effectiveness Program (LEP) and the Disability Services Program (DSP).

<u>Course Requirements</u>	<u>Percent of Final Grade</u>
Class attendance and participation, including full participation in Ghana Excursion	40
Reflection Essays	30
Ghana journal and course reflection	30

**Grading Scale for All Class Assignments**

<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Grade</u>
<u>95-100</u>	<u>A</u>
<u>90-94</u>	<u>A-</u>
<u>87-89</u>	<u>B+</u>
<u>84-86</u>	<u>B</u>
<u>80-83</u>	<u>B-</u>
<u>77-79</u>	<u>C+</u>
<u>74-76</u>	<u>C</u>
<u>70-73</u>	<u>C-</u>
<u>67-69</u>	<u>D+</u>
<u>64-66</u>	<u>D</u>
<u>60-63</u>	<u>D-</u>
<u>0-59</u>	<u>F</u>

**Class attendance and participation**

In a course like this, where much of the learning occurs in class and in the field, face-to-face participation is essential. Accordingly, 40 percent of each student’s grade will be based on the quality of course participation. Attendance will be monitored and all students are expected to contribute actively to the course process.

Attendance is mandatory in all class sessions as well as in all aspects of the Ghana class excursion. These may not be made up in another class session. If an emergency arises, it is the student’s responsibility to contact Prof. Jones.

There are always considerable individual differences in comfort with class participation. If you are a person who normally talks a lot in class, make an effort to participate a little

less. Conversely, if you are a shy person who is usually reticent about participating, push yourself to participate more. Everyone should keep in mind that quality rather than quantity is most important. Those students who are consistently up on the readings and able to offer informed comments will be rewarded with a generous grade for class participation (see information below about the determination of grades for class participation).

**The grade for the class participation component of the course will be determined as follows:**

- 75 percent of the grade will be based on attendance. Any unexcused absences will result in a loss of points.
- 25 percent of the grade will be based on ratings of the quality of course participation. Again, it is the *quality* of participation that is important. For example, domination of course discussions *and* no participation in course discussions at all are equally problematic. What we're aiming for is an experience of each person's presence in the course community as essential to our collective learning. Different students, with different temperaments, can all make important contributions to the community.

**Required Written Assignments**

Reflection Essays

There will be three required reflection essays. Each essay will be approximately 500-600 words, and will consist of student's reflections/reactions/thoughts in response to the required readings/film viewings for the upcoming class meeting. Each essay will be graded using the following rubric:

<b>Grading Criterion</b>	<b>Maximum Points</b>	<b>Points Awarded</b>
The writer provides a brief summary of the selected reading(s), noting the parts to which she is reacting.	10	
The writer describes ways in which the selected readings enhanced her understanding of African American oral communication practices and traditions as well as some of the African cultural sensibilities that spurred the development of these traditions	30	
The writer reflects on unanswered questions that arose for her after completing the readings, and provides, where relevant, a succinct critique of some of the arguments waged in the selected readings.	30	
The writer organizes her essay in an effective way, while also attending to rules of spelling, grammar and punctuation.	30	
<b>Overall Score</b>	<b>100</b>	

Reflection Essay Due Dates

**Due Thursday, June 26<sup>th</sup>:** Reflections on Required Readings for Class Session 2

**Due Thursday, July 17<sup>th</sup>:** Reflections on Required Readings for Class Session 3

**Due Thursday, July 31<sup>st</sup>:** Reflections on Required Readings for Class Session 4

---

Ghana Excursion Journal

Each student will keep a daily journal during each of the days of our Ghana excursion and will submit a final draft of the completed journal upon return to Denver. The finalized journal will also include a concluding section providing reflections on learning in the course (how the course compared to expectations, new learning, challenges experienced, surprising insights, disappointments, etc.). **The complete journal (including the concluding section) should be submitted to Prof. Jones electronically, by email, no later than midnight on Tuesday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

This is how the journal will be evaluated:

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Maximum Points</b>	<b>Points Awarded</b>
The writer provides a compelling first person narrative of her daily experiences in Ghana. She describes effectively the ways in which each day's experiences expanded and amplified her understanding of the issues we are exploring in the course.	70	
Attending to each of the 3 course learning objectives, the writer's concluding section provides a final reflection on course learnings, including both summer class sessions in Denver and the Ghana excursion. The discussion is punctuated with specific illustrations from readings, films, discussions, and experiences in Ghana.	15	
The writer organizes her reflections in an effective way, while also attending to rules of spelling, grammar and punctuation.	15	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	

## **Course Schedule**

### **Session 1: Friday, June 20<sup>th</sup>**

Prelude: African American Oral Communication Traditions  
and Their West African Cultural Foundations

#### Required Reading:

Thurman Garner and Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, "African American Orality: Expanding Rhetoric," in Ronald L. Jackson II and Elaine B. Richardson (eds.), Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations. New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 43-55.

Janice Hamlet, Word! The African American Oral Tradition and Its Rhetorical Impact on African American Culture. Black History Bulletin, 74 (1), 2011, 27-29.

Arthur C. Jones, Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Boulder, CO: Leave a Little Room, 2005. Chapter 1: "Over My Head I Hear Music in the Air: African Beginnings," pp. 1-18.

#### Required Video Viewing:

"This Far By Faith: African American Spiritual Journeys": Episode 1. Go to <https://coursemedia.du.edu>, select our course, and go to "Course Films"

---

### **Session 2: Friday, June 27<sup>th</sup>**

An Evolutionary Laboratory for Survival and Transcendence:  
Spiritually Anchored Folk Expressions in the Crucible of Slavery

#### Required Reading:

LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Blues People: Negro Music in White America. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963. Chapters 1-3 ("The Negro as Non-American: Some Backgrounds," "The Negro as Property," and "African Slaves/American Slaves: Their Music"), pp. 1-31.

Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: African American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition). New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Chapter 1: "The Sacred World of Black Slaves," pp. 3-80.

**Session 3: Friday, July 18<sup>th</sup>**  
The Storytelling Impulse and African American Language

Required Reading:

Tempii B. Champion, Understanding Storytelling Among African American Children: A Journey from Africa to America. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003. Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-27.

Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: African American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition). New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Chapter 2: “The Meaning of Slave Tales,” pp. 81-135.

Marcyliena Morgan, Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Chapter 4: “When women speak: how and why we enter,” pp. 84-110.

Geneva Smitherman, Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans. New York: Routledge, 2006. Chapter 1: “African American Language: So good it’s bad,” pp. 1-19, and Chapter 4: “Honeyz and Playaz Talkin that Talk,” pp. 64-81.

-----

**Session 4: Friday, August 1<sup>st</sup>**  
The Power of Musicality, Rhythm and Language Across the Spectrum  
of African American Oral Communication Traditions

John Blake, “Black Preachers Who ‘Whoop,’ Ministers or Minstrels?” CNN, October 20, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/10/20/whooping/>

Katherine J. Harris, Pan-African Language Systems: Ebonics and African American Heritage. London: Karnak House, 2003. Chapter III, pp. 47-94.

Cleophus J. LaRue, I Believe I’ll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011. Chapter 7: “Why Black Preachers Still Love Artful Language.”

Portia K. Maultsby, “Africanisms in African American Music,” in Joseph E. Holloway (Ed.), Africanisms in American Culture. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 185-210.

Portia K. Maulsby, Mellonee V. Burnim and Susan Oehler, “Intellectual History,” in African American Music: An Introduction. New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 7-32.

**Available for Free Download Through DU Library:** Elijah Wald, The Dozens: A History of Rap’s Mama, a history of the street insult game that has inspired artists from Jelly Roll Morton to Zora Neale Hurston to NWA. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Chapter 1: “A Trip down Twelfth Street,” and Chapter 9: “African Roots.”

Felicia R. Walker, “An Afrocentric Rhetorical Analysis of Johnnie Cochran’s Closing Argument in the O.J. Simpson Trial,” in Ronald L. Jackson II and Elaine B. Richardson (Eds.), Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations. New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 245-262.

---

**Session 5: Friday, August 15<sup>th</sup>**  
West African Retrospective; Preparation for Ghana

Required:

View documentary film, “Traces of the Trade,” via <https://coursemedia.du.edu> ; Go to our course, and then select “Course Films.”

---

**Ghana Travel: August 17<sup>th</sup> - August 27<sup>th</sup>**

---

**Final Potluck Celebration/Debriefing Session**  
**Wednesday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6:30 – 8:30 pm,**  
**Home of Art Jones**  
**1395 Dahlia St, Northeast Denver**