

“ENG 400: African American Rhetorics” by Michael Burns
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“Soundwriting and Resistance: Toward a Pedagogy for Liberation”

ENG 400-05: African American Rhetorics

Fall 2014
MWF 9-9:50am
Main 415

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Key words: African American rhetorics, Afrocentricity, black English, AAVE, Ebonics, race in the U.S., rhetoric, black publics, black popular culture, black politics

Course Description

What is AAVE/black English? What is its history? Its evolution? What is its structure as a language system—rhetorically, semantically, linguistically—and how does it inform our understanding of the black American experience? What does the uptake of black language in mainstream popular culture look like and what does it signify?

These and other questions will inform our work in *ENG 400: African American Rhetorics*. Drawing on the definition put forth by Elaine Richardson and Ronald Jackson, we will approach this course as the “study of culturally and discursively developed knowledge-forms, communicative practices and persuasive strategies rooted in freedom struggles by people of African ancestry in America.” We will consider the ways in which black Americans’ rhetoric reveals a more nuanced understanding of the black experience and an awareness of the available means to improve the social, political, and material realities of black people.

This course meets the **Writing Emphasis** component of the WCU General Education curriculum:

- You will have opportunity to work on shorter informal assignments and longer formal works of writing.
- We will spend time in class discussing the writing process and conducting peer review.
- You will be given opportunity to revise your writing based on feedback from me and your peers.
- Your work in the course will culminate in a 2500-3000 word researched seminar paper and an oral presentation.

This course meets three **General Education** goals that will help students learn to:

- Respond thoughtfully to diversity
- Communicate effectively in writing
- Think critically and analytically

This course also meets the following **Diverse Communities** course objectives:

- Students will be able to identify, compare, and differentiate critical issues related to historically marginalized groups;
- Students will demonstrate the ability to effectively apply theoretical framework(s) to analyze structural inequities relative to groups/content studied;
- Students will be able to articulate an informed and reasoned openness to differences related to groups studied;
- Students will be able to assess and evaluate broad social policies and practices in light of the university's goal of graduating students who are committed to creating a just and equitable society.

This course also fulfills a requirement for the African/African American Literature (AAAL) Minor, which enables students to meet five specific learning outcomes. Students in the Minor will:

- Broaden and deepen their understanding of the full range of African and African American literary expression.
- Engage in acts of critical reading, analytical writing, and theoretical inquiry that will enable them to refine their critical abilities and develop their political and social awareness.
- Enhance their appreciation for the multiplicity of experiences and voices within African and African American literatures and cultures.
- Develop a broad-based understanding of the history of black global experience and its impact on racial issues today.
- Learn to “see” race in a way that makes them more attuned to the workings of structural oppression and more capable of empathizing with the lives and experiences of people of color.

Required Texts

Alim, H. Samy., and Geneva Smitherman. *Articulate While Black: Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.

Asante, Molefi Kete. *Race, Rhetoric, and Identity: The Architecton of Soul.* Amherst, NY: Humanity, 2005. Print.

Jackson, Ronald L., and Elaine B. Richardson. *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations.* New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Rickford, John Russell, and Russell John Rickford. *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English.* New York: Wiley, 2000. Print.

Other readings will be made available on reserve and online.

Course Evaluation

Participation: Your *regular and informed* contributions are essential to the success of this course *and* your success in this course. Prepare for class by doing the reading, completing formal and informal writing assignments, taking notes, and coming to the class meetings on time with materials (e.g., texts, paper, pen), ideas (e.g., questions, comments), and energy to contribute to discussion. **Please bear in mind that you bring a perspective to this class that no one else can.**

Attendance: Students are permitted **three** absences for personal reasons; no documentation is needed. Any absence beyond the allowable maximum three of will affect your grade. Four absences will result in a 1/3 grade deduction from your final grade (e.g. a B- becomes a C+), five absences will result in a 2/3 grade reduction (A- becomes a B). Six absences will result in an automatic F for **the final grade of the course.**

If you miss class, get the notes and/or materials from a classmate. **Assume that what you missed was important.** Participation in a University-sanctioned event will not be penalized. By University directive, however, written notice must be provided in advance of the event, and any work due must be submitted early. In the case of serious medical situations or emergencies (such as ongoing illness), it is your responsibility to contact the Office of Judicial Affairs and Student Assistance at (601) 436-3511, which will then contact your professors and make necessary accommodations.

Lateness: Students more than 5 minutes late will be marked “absent”; however they can still get credit for in-class work.

In-class writing, response papers, informal presentations: I will frequently assign short writing assignments and in-class activities. These assignments are offered to help you better develop the relationship between your thinking and writing. The assignments will be graded either on a credit/no credit basis (for quick assignments or in-class activities, for example) or on a 3-point scale (more involved but shorter written work). To me, a “3” means “excellent work” and figures into your grade like an A, a “2” means “pretty good” and figures into your grade like a B+, and a “1” means “needs work” and figures into your grade like a C; a 0 or failing grade is given if you do not complete the assignment.

There will also be regular *response writing* that will serve as the basis for class discussion. The goal for these assignments is to get you thinking about the readings, making connections between readings and class discussions, raising insights and questions that come out of your engagement with the course. We will work out the terms of the response papers in the first week of class.

Each class member will give *informal presentations* which should offer an overview of the material and discussion questions for the day’s readings.

Formal Writing and Presentation: The major writing assignments in this course are designed to move from an initial critical engagement with the material to a full-fledged synthesized argument. Major writing assignments include (but are not limited to): a short research paper (1000-1500 words); a final paper proposal and annotated bibliography of primary and secondary critical sources (1500-2000 words); and a final research paper with a formal presentation (2500-3000 words).

Exemplary papers will be entered in the English Department’s Best Seminar Paper Competition. I will notify you of my decision before making the entry. If you do not want your work submitted for consideration, I will respect your wishes.

Grading Breakdown

Evaluation

Participation and Attendance:	10%
In Class Writing and Response Papers:	20%
Short Research Paper:	15%
Annotated Bibliography and Final Paper Proposal:	20%
Informal Presentations:	15%
<u>Final Research Paper:</u>	<u>20%</u>
Total:	100%

Grade for the Course

“A” (90-100% of total points available) grades connote excellent work that presents original thinking or insight that is clearly, correctly, and gracefully written. “B” (80-89%) grades connote good work that

fully satisfies an assignment's expectations with clear competence, though the level of sophistication of thought and writing of an "A" is absent; the work is well written in terms of argument, mechanics, support, and structure. "C" (70-79%) grades connote fair work that minimally meets an assignment's specifications and is generally correct in terms of mechanics and structure but lacks thorough analysis, elaboration, and/or mechanics. "D" grades (60-69%) connote poor work that is inadequate in at least one way, including failure to maintain focus, skimpy or illogical development, and significant writing errors in mechanics. "F" grades (0-59%) connote work that fails to respond acceptably to an assignment.

Submission Policy

All digitally submitted work is due by 11pm the evening before class unless otherwise specified. All work submitted by paper hardcopy is due at the beginning of the class meeting. Any works submitted after these specified times are considered late and will result in the lowering of the grade by $\frac{1}{3}$ for every calendar day it is late. If circumstances arise that prevent you from handing work in on time, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can make arrangements for you to make up the assignments. All major assignments must be completed to receive a grade in the course. I will return graded assignments within 2 weeks of the due date.

Academic Honesty

For questions regarding Academic Dishonesty, the No-Grade policy, Sexual Harassment, or the Student Code of Conduct, students are encouraged to refer to their major department's handbook, the Undergraduate Course Catalogue, the Rams Eye View, or the University website. Please understand that improper conduct in any of these areas will not be tolerated and may result in immediate ejection from the class.

Writing Center

Contact the University Writing Center, 214 Lawrence Hall (610-430-5664; www.wcupa.edu/academics/writingcenter/) for help with any aspect of your writing. Tutorials last one half hour, and you can often make an appointment the same day you call, walk in, or sign up online.

Desire to Learn (D2L) Course Website

You must have reliable access to our D2L course website (<http://D2L.wcupa.edu>) in order to access secondary readings and get calendar updates. If you cannot access D2L reliably from an off-campus location, you must plan to use campus facilities (FHG Library, Anderson Hall computer lab, Sykes Union, Main Hall computer lab).

Accommodations for Disabilities

If you need an instructional accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) due to a physical or learning disability, give me an official authorization letter ASAP from the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD), ossd@wcupa.edu; ext. 3217.

Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive classroom behavior will be handled according to University policy. If I see you texting, doing homework for another class, napping in class, and so on, I reserve the right to ask you to leave class for the day. Please set all cell phones to silent. If you want to use a web-accessible device, please ask me first.

Withdrawal

Your enrollment after the August 31 add-deadline confirms that you accept all instructional practices, requirements, and policies. The final day to drop classes is August 30. If you are not properly enrolled in this course and/or your schedule is dropped, you cannot receive a grade in this course, even if you sit

through the entire course and do all of the work.

Campus Emergencies

If a condition threatens the health and safety of persons on campus, University officials will warn the campus community via text messages and WCU e-mail. Updated emergency information and instructions will be provided on the WCU homepage. The emergency phone number for WCU's Dept. of Public Safety is (610) 436-3311.

Changing the Culture of Violence

Have you or someone you know experienced sexual harassment or assault? Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments PROHIBITS sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexual assault, rape, and sexual coercion at all public and private schools which receive Federal funds. Schools are required to respond promptly and effectively to eliminate the harassment or violence as well as prevent its recurrence and address its effects. There are several on-campus and off-campus ways to report sexual misconduct. File a Sexual Misconduct Report. Filing a report does not mean you will have to get involved with the investigation or go to court. Victims under the influence of drugs or alcohol WILL NOT face disciplinary charges from WCU. Learn More At:

<http://www.wcupa.edu/admin/social.equity/sexualmisconduct/sexualMisconductReport.asp>.

Assaults on campus can be reported to Public Safety (610) 436-3311, the Health Center (610) 436-2509, or the Women's Center (610) 436-2122. The Women's Center offers assistance for victims, friends, and family members of a recent or past assault. Open 9AM to 5PM Monday through Friday. Crime and Victim's Center of Chester County - 24 hour hotline for sexual assault and rape in Chester County: 610-692-RAPE (7273).

APSCUF

I am a member of APSCUF, the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties. We uphold the highest standards of teaching, scholarly inquiry, and service. We are an organization that is committed to promoting excellence in all that we do to ensure that our students receive the highest quality education. For more on our organization, see www.apscuf.org

Course Schedule¹

Week	Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
1	Intro to the Field, African Origins	8/25 Introductions, course policies	8/27 Gilyard, "Introduction: Aspects of AAR as a Field" in African American Rhetorics	8/29 Karenga, Nommo, Kawaida, and Communicative Practice," in UAAR; Smitherman, "From Africa to the New World and into the Space Age." in Talkin and Testifyin 1-15.
2	AAVE is a Language, American Politics and Voices Against White Supremacy	9/1 Labor Day No Class	9/3 Rickfords, "Part Three: The Living Language" in Spoken Soul.	9/5 Asante, "Trouble at the Gate: Identity Crisis" and "DuBois and the Souls of Blackfolk" in RR&I
3	Antebellum, Reconstruction, and Post-Reconstruction	9/8 Wilson Logan, "Black Speakers, White Representations"	9/10 Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman"; Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"	9/12 Ida B. Wells, "The Lynch Law and all its Phases"
4	Civil Rights	9/15 Ella Forbes, "Every Man Fights for His Freedom." Ch. 10 in UAAR.	9/17 Wilson, Kirt H. "Interpreting the Discursive Field of the Montgomery Bus Boycott: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Holt Street Address."; Martin Luther King, Jr., Selections from A Testament of Hope; Malcolm X, "The Ballot or The Bullet"	9/19 Fannie Lou Hamer, "We're On Our Way"; short paper draft due; workshop
5	Nationalist Rhetoric: Black Power, Black Arts Movement	9/22 Schneider, "Freedom Schooling: Stokely Carmichael and Critical Rhetorical Education"; Stewart, "The Evolution of a Revolution"	9/24 Screening, Black Power Mixtape	9/26 Screening, cont.
6	Black Politics in the 1970s (short paper final due)	9/29 Pough, "Rhetoric That Should Have Moved the People"	10/1 Newton, In Defense of Defense	10/3 Newton, In Defense of Defense; workshop papers
7	Language As Culture: Verbal Art, Wordplay, Music	10/6 Fall Break-No Class	10/8 Rickford and Rickford, "Singers, Toasters, and Rappers." Ch. 5 in Spoken Soul.	10/10 Celnisha Dangerfield, "Lauryn Hill as Lyricist and Womanist." Ch 13 in UAAR;
8	Individual Conferences	10/13 No Class, individual conferences	10/15 No Class, individual conferences	10/17 No Class, individual conferences

¹ Please note: the course schedule is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and on D2L.

9	Black Image in Mainstream Media	10/20 Asante, "De-racing the Media." Ch. 2 in RR&I	10/22 Rickford and Rickford, "The Media." Ch. 10 in Spoken Soul.	10/24 TBA
10	Black English in the Classroom	10/27 Rickford and Rickford, "Education." Ch. 9 in Spoken Soul	10/29 CCC's Students' Right to Their Own Language	10/31 TBA
11	Comedy	11/3 Rickford and Rickford, "Comedians and Actors." Ch. 4 in Spoken Soul; The Minstrel Tradition and Old School Comics	11/5 Mid School Comics-Dick Gregory, Richard Pryor	11/7 Annotated bibliography/final proposal due; New School Comics-Dave Chappelle, W. Kamau Bell
12	Barack Obama and Trayvon Martin	11/10 Alim and Smitherman, Articulate While Black	11/12 Alim and Smitherman, Articulate While Black	11/14 Alim and Smitherman, Articulate While Black
13	Final Paper and Presentation Workshops	11/17 Final Paper Rough Draft Due	11/19 Workshop	11/21 Workshop
14	Final Paper and Presentation Workshops	11/24	11/26 Thanksgiving Break-No Class	11/28 Thanksgiving Break No Class
15	Final Presentations	12/1	12/3	12/5
16	Final Presentations (final paper due)	12/8 Final Paper Due, Wrap up		