

# **Cultivating Human: How Evolution, Diversity, and Communication Uniquely Shaped Human Beings**

*An Osher Life-Long Learning Course for U.C. Berkeley  
Fall 2021*

**Instructor:** Carlos D. Torres, Ph.D.

**Email:** carlos.torres@sonoma.edu

## **Course Format:**

Class meetings for this semester are on Zoom. Please make sure you are muted unless speaking. Feel free to use the chat feature to ask questions. We'll break the class into two halves with a question break between, and a chance to address questions and discuss material at the end of both halves of the class. I will share my screen to show the PowerPoint slides and will play sound and movie excerpts from my computer. If you experience a lag, try turning off your camera. Everything works better from a computer than from a phone and you will miss the visual components of the course on the tele.

## **Course Description**

In this course we will chart the story of human communication: starting with the cognitive evolution of early human primates and running through the history of humanity to our modern-day network society. We will learn about the people who questioned enduring prejudicial framings of the world and overview the places and times in which they lived to demonstrate how evolution, diversity, and communication enabled humanity to develop culturally, politically, and spiritually. *Cultivating Human* makes use of new and insightful research in anthropology and history to outline this remarkable journey of *Homo communicatus*, the modern communicative animal.

### **Week 1 – “Our Biocommunication Legacy” & “A Bipedal Animal Arises”**

- How is human communication similar to animal communication? What communication legacies do we share with life on earth? For the first half of class “Our Biocommunication Legacy,” we will review the biological evolutionary milestones that lead to human communication (beginning with cellular organisms) and connects human communication deeply to ways in which animals communicate, and to our common ancestral communication pathways.
- Reassessing what we know, how is great ape communication similar to human communication? How does it differ? For the second half of the class, “A Bipedal Animal Arises,” we will review research of primate communication of the last fifty years and brings up to date what primatologists have revealed about the communication abilities of our closest living relatives.

### **Week 2 – “The Inscription of Consciousness”**

- What kinds messages can be inferred from the early human cave painting? What are the earliest stories of human beings? For the first half of class, we will focus on the origins of cave art circa 73k BCE in the Blombos Cave of South Africa, paleolithic art (circa 30k BCE, to the end of the Pleistocene 9.6k BCE).
- How do we know oral language use must have been prevalent for tens of thousands of years before written language? And why did it take so long for human beings to create a written language? For the second half of class, we will begin at the formation of written language in

pictographs from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China. We'll also review some of the research of Maya glyphs that were part of my Ph.D. dissertation, and the transition of early pictographs into alphabetic forms of writing and communication.

### **Week 3 – “Coexistence & the Essence of Being Human”**

- What are some of the major currents of thought during the Axial Age, and how has this time continued to shape the consciousness of a modern world? In the first half of class, we will review some of the early Classic period texts and the formative discussions embedded in the world religions.
- How did communication change during the rise of Nation-States in the Classical World time period? In the second half of class, we will define the communication of the large-scale Republics and Empires (circa 1500 BCE – 660 CE) and describe the layered societal status and mobility inherent in texts to inform social relations, the language of logistics in empire and birth of bureaucratic orders.

### **Week 4 – “An Age of Darkness Enlightens”**

- In the first half of the class, we will begin with an examination of Augustine's *Confessions*, and the ramifications for the sacred Judeo-Christian framing of life that accompanied the Dark and Middle Ages of Europe.
- In the second half of class, we will discuss the enlightenment of the world during the Middle Ages when there is a growth of intercontinental trade networks; cross-cultural communication opens up in Asia, the Middle East, Northern Africa, Central American, and Spain. Diversity of expression in Europe begins under the rule of Abd al-Rahmān III (circa 920 CE) of Granada and Alfonso X of Spain (circa 1280). Woodblock printing begins in the Tang Dynasty China and culminating in the golden age of classical Chinese culture (circa 618 to 907 CE).

### **Week 5 – “The Democracy of Communication”**

- What contributed to unequal development in the world? When and where did the freedom of expression originate? In the first half of class, we will discuss the democratization of human communication through widespread literacy and the new accessibility of print materials upon European citizens after the fall of Constantinople and the translation of philosophy from Arabic sources.
- What are some of the pitfalls and potentials inherent in a free press? How does it alter the form and function of textual communication? How does new media technology change self-expression and information dissemination? In The Second Half of Class, we will highlight the growth of Manifestos and news print beginning with the French and American Revolutions and the rise of the public sphere.

### **Week 6 – “A Mirror onto Ourselves”**

- How does visual technology change self-expression and information dissemination? How does the development of visual communication transform human behavior and psychology? In the first half of class, we will profile the technical revolution in visual communication and how technology changes the perception of time and the inner dialogues of human beings. Photography comes of age, and Alexander Gardner's photography of Antietam and Gettysburg is profiled along with the interpersonal communication that followed the viewing of these photos in New York..
- In the second half of class, we will discover how the *language of film* develops in the global

cinema-scapes of Sweden, Japan, France, and Hollywood, how visual communication becomes encoded into our senses and understanding in deeply psychological ways and means by filmmakers. We'll also look at film clips associated with the journey of visual anthropology like *Nanook of the North* & *Forest of Bliss*.

### **Week 7 – “The Communication of the Now”**

- What are the ramifications of broadcast media, and where does it begin? How does broadcast communication contribute to social mobilization, nationalism, persuasion, and time-space compression? In the first half of the class, we will outline how human communication is altered into the instantaneous transmission from the one-to-the-many in recorded and simultaneous time in radio; the marketplace of transmission is infused with news and information and enters the domestic spheres. Communication milestones in the U.S. and world up to WWII.
- In the second half of the class, we will look at broadcast as a medium of political messaging, particularly at the disjuncture in the messaging between mainstream portrayals of the U.S. and the countercurrents that were emerging from U.S. political actions overseas.

### **Week 8 – “The Intercommunication Revolution”**

- How and why is the global cultural revolution of 1968 a sea change in global consciousness and communication? What are the ramifications of the information age on the social fabric of modern society? In the first half of the class we will look at the sea changes in diversity and communication that accompany the 1960s, the shifting and questioning of messaging of the younger population with what has gone before, paradigmatic shifts in the perception of war, power, sexuality, feminism, etc.
- In the second half of the class we will look at communication and diversity in the “net” world, social media and the paradigmatic shifts in the perception gender, identity, race, continue and open up into postmodern possibilities and queer culture. The first netwar begins in Chiapas, Mexico, net-activism, and the paradox of “senses isolation” as people are simultaneously more connected than ever, and more siloed than ever as well.

### **Big Arguments I'll make in the Course**

1. Communication is the medium for biological evolution, and the primary driver of cognitive evolution. Cross-cultural communication enacted by diverse people with diverse perspectives is the primary driver of societal development in human society.
2. In a world rent by chaotic forces both social and environmental, communication has always provided the means to reestablish order and concord, the natural arbiter of societal change and recomposition. Conversely, societal miscommunication or lack of communication (lack of access to truth-in-knowledge) is primarily responsible for perpetuating ignorance and fear of others, leading to violence, chaos, and desolation.
3. Ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism, and androcentrism are three persistent discriminatory framings that magnify and endure as population density increases. The story of societal development is a story of overcoming and “overriding” these discriminatory impulses in human behavior and societal organization.

### **Human Communication – A Bibliography**

- *Biocommunication: Sign-Mediated Interactions Between Cells and Organisms*, (2017); Richard Gordon and Joseph Seckbach, eds.

- *In the Shadow of Man* (2010) by Jane Goodhall
- *The Mind in the Cave* (2002) by David Lewis-Williams
- *The Story of Writing: Alphabets, Hieroglyphs & Pictograms* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2007) by Andrew Robinson
- *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* (2008), by E. J. Michael Witzel,
- *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (2012; Robert Bellah and Hans Joas, eds.
- *The Long Shadow of Antiquity: What Have the Greeks and Romans Done for Us?* (2019), by Gregory S. Aldrete, Ph.D. and Alicia Aldrete
- *The Year 1000: When Explorers Connected the World—and Globalization Began* (2020) by Valerie Hanson
- *The Pillow Book* (2007) by Sei Shonagon
- *300 Tang Poems* (2011); Geoffrey Waters, Michael Farman, and David Lunde, trans.
- *A Vanished World: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Medieval Spain* (2006) by Chris Lowney
- *In Search of First Contact: The Vikings of Vinland, the Peoples of the Dawnland, and the Anglo-American Anxiety of Discovery* (2012) by Annette Kolodny
- *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (2013); Suzanne Desan and Lynn Hunt, eds.
- *New World Begins: The History of the French Revolution* (2019) by Jeremy Popkin
- *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know Itself* (2015) by Andrew Pettegree
- *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (1989) by Neal Gabler
- *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (2013) by Hilary Hallet
- *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley
- "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) by Walter Benjamin, [web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf)
- *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* (2013) by Stephen Kinzer
- *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) by Marshall McLuhan
- *Silent Spring* (1963), by Rachel's Carson
- *Manufacturing Consent* (2002) by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky
- *The Power of Identity* (2004) by Manuel Castells
- *Beyond Mars and Venus: Relationship Skills for Today's Complex World* (2017) by David Gray
- *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* Paperback (2007) by Deborah Tannen
- *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2015) by Yuval Harari
- *The First Idea: How Symbols, Language, and Intelligence Evolved from Our Primate Ancestors to Modern Humans* (2004), by Stanley I. Greenspan and Stuart Shanker
- *Now You're Talking: Human Conversation from the Neanderthals to Artificial Intelligence* (2019) by Trevor Cox
- *Revolutions in Communication* (2016) by Bill Novariks
- *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (2014) by Andrew Pettegree
- *Story Proof: The Science Behind the Startling Power of Story* (2007) by Kendall Haven
- *How Language Began: Gesture and Speech in Human Evolution* (2012) by David McNeill
- *How Language Began: The Story of Humanity's Greatest Invention* (2017) by Daniel L. Everett