

THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES & THE  
DEPARTMENT OF AFRICANA STUDIES PRESENTS

# JACOB K. OLUPONA

(Harvard University Divinity School)

Lecture: "Embodiment, Relationality, and Materiality in  
African Religion and the African Diaspora Traditions"

Saturday, April 22, 2017

2:00 - 3:30 PM, 501 Cathedral of Learning

Post-keynote reception from 3:30 - 4:30 PM

In this lecture, I will explore some aspects of African religious traditions that highlight the importance of a deeper understanding and interpretation of material culture, embodied knowledge and practices, and relationality. While texts and myths are incredibly valuable, I have argued that a significant entry into the understanding of African religion is through praxis - the lived traditions that are embodied in sacred festivals and rituals, and the material culture that animates these traditions. Indeed, in the past decades, even scholars of the so-called world religions have turned to these approaches to provide a more in-depth understanding of their respective traditions. Based on a deeper understanding of Yoruba religions in West Africa and the diaspora, I will illustrate how the devotees and the deities themselves deploy the metaphors and symbols of the body and materiality to ground the meaning of the sacred in concrete context.



**Bio:** Jacob K. Olupona is Professor of African Religious Traditions at the Harvard University Divinity School, with a joint appointment as Professor of African and African American Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. His research ranges across African spirituality and ritual practices, spirit possession, Pentecostalism, Yoruba festivals, animal symbolism, icons, phenomenology, African immigrant religions, and religious pluralism in Africa and the Americas. He is the author of *Òrìsà Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture* (University of Wisconsin Press), *City of 201 Gods: Ilé-Ifè in Time, Space, and the Imagination* (University of California Press), and *African Immigrant Religions in America* (NYU Press), among others. Olupona has received grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Philosophical Society, the Ford Foundation, the Davis Humanities Institute, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Getty Foundation. He has also served as president of the African Association for the Study of Religion.

This PUBLIC LECTURE is part of the *Diverse Spiritualities Symposium* taking place from April 20 - 22, 2017.



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