

African Religions of the Americas  
 Religion 17, Fall 2013, MWF 1:45 p.m.-2:50 p.m.  
 X-period TH 1p.m.-1:50 p.m.  
 Professor: Elizabeth Pérez  
 Office: Thornton Hall 305  
 Office Phone: 6-9289  
 Office Hours: TBD  
 Email: Elizabeth.Perez@Dartmouth.edu

### Course description and objectives

This class introduces the history and practices of African-derived religious traditions as they have developed in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Black American communities in the United States. These religious systems will be discussed with reference to their representation in the mainstream media (in television shows and Hollywood movies, for example), and analyzed according to the more complex realities of their practitioners' everyday lives. Three themes to be explored in each tradition include 1) gender identity; 2) racial identity and resistance; and 3) aesthetics. Among the questions to be posed throughout the quarter are the following:

- Do women wield religious power in this tradition, and if so, on what terms?
- How do these religions effect practitioners' responses to oppressive social conditions?
- How do 'art' and other material objects encode moral-ethical values?
- How do these religions enable practitioners to fashion a communal identity?

The success of this course will rest upon your active participation. My goals for this course are that **YOU**:

- Collaborate with fellow students throughout the quarter in order to create a classroom community.
- Increase the range of your theoretical facility with concepts drawn from a range of scholarly disciplines, including the history of religions and anthropology.
- Craft assignments that combine class material with outside readings and cultivate your unique voice.
- Learn to appreciate the range of religious formations and cultural modes to be found within the African Diaspora/Black Atlantic.

If these objectives are met, you should be able to:

- Hold up your end of a casual conversation with a practitioner of one of these traditions, and enjoy doing so.

- Deconstruct and otherwise critically assess media reports concerning African religions of the Americas.
- Better understand the religious legacy of West and Central African peoples in the contemporary Atlantic world.
- Explain relationship of ganja to Rastafari identity, and what it means to have 'mojo.'
- Identify the Black religious history of some quintessentially American cultural forms.

## Requirements

1. You are expected to **attend class regularly** and **finish assigned readings *before class***.  
 2. You are required to **contribute to class discussions**, and **inform me beforehand of any absences**. Come prepared to be called on at random and to share your impressions of the material. The quality of your contribution overall will be determined by:

- a) Frequency and relevance of your verbal comments.
- b) Preparation for class, as expressed in knowledgeable references made to the contents of assigned readings.
- c) Ability to comprehend, communicate, and critically reflect on the themes and theses of the assigned readings.
- d) Punctuality. (Snooze=lose.)

3. You need to **meet with me once before the midterm**, either during my office hours or at a time of your choice.

4. You must agree to **complete a midterm exam** and a **final exam**, due at the end of the quarter.

5. You must **obtain the readings assignments** via the Blackboard Menu in *Syllabus*, "Syllabus with Links to Readings," or *Course Materials*, "Readings Hyperlinked."

6. You are responsible for presenting during one of the class sessions on one article/book chapter paired with the day's reading assignment. This is either a reading listed on the syllabus as "{for presenter}" or one to be assigned via email/office hours. Presenting entails *does not* entail summarizing its contents for the class, but instead drawing out its main points, and offering suggestions for analysis, preferably with a printed hand-out or Powerpoint presentation the class can follow. I will grade you on the content of your reports, as well as the following:

- 1. **Organization**—was your presentation organized logically?
- 2. **Clarity**—could we hear you and understand what you were trying to say?
- 3. **Eye Contact**—did you make eye contact with everyone (not just with the professor?)
- 4. **Enthusiasm**—did you convey your interest in the topic under discussion?

7. In addition, you must **observe the following standards for courtesy**:

\*No audible yawning, flamboyant stretching, or obvious eating

\*No whispering or passing notes

**Please note: The professor reserves the right to fail/withhold credit for the course unless all of the assignments have been turned in on time.**

### **Grading**

Your final grade will be decided according to the following components:

Midterm exam/Final exam: **60%**

Classroom participation: **30%**

Presentation and short assignments (graded on a ✓, ✓+, or ✓- basis): **10%**

**EXAMPLE:** STUDENT X ATTENDS ALL CLASS MEETINGS BUT ONE, RECEIVES A 90% ON ALL OF HER EXAMS, ATTENDS ALL OF THE EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES, AND FINISHES ALL OF HER ASSIGNMENTS ON TIME. **HOWEVER, SHE ONLY ASKS A QUESTION OR MAKES A COMMENT FOUR TIMES IN CLASS OVER THE COURSE OF THE QUARTER (APPROXIMATELY 28 CLASS SESSIONS).** *What is Student X's final grade? B-.*

Please read the components to the grade once again! **100%-30% classroom participation=70%.** With the extra credit factored in, Student X will receive--at most—a B-.

Note the grade descriptions listed by the Dartmouth College Office of the Registrar:  
[http://www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/transcript/grade\\_descriptions.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/transcript/grade_descriptions.html)

## Scholarship Ratings (Grade Descriptions)

Grade	Description	Grade Point Values
A	1. Excellent mastery of course material	A: 4
	2. Student performance indicates a very high degree of originality, creativity, or both	A- : 3 2/3
	3. Excellent performance in analysis, synthesis, and critical expression, oral or written	
	4. Student works independently with unusual effectiveness	
B	1. Good mastery of course material	B+: 3 1/3
	2. Student performance demonstrates a high degree of originality, creativity, or both	B: 3
	3. Good performance in analysis, synthesis, and critical expression, oral or written	B-: 2 2/3
	4. Student works well independently	
C	1. Acceptable mastery of course material	C+: 2 1/3
	2. Student demonstrates some degree of originality, creativity, or both	C: 2
	3. Acceptable performance in analysis, synthesis, and critical expression, oral or written	C-: 1 2/3
	4. Student works independently at an acceptable level	
D	1. Deficient in mastery of course material	D: 1
	2. Originality, creativity, or both apparently absent from performance	
	3. Deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, and critical expression, oral or written	
	4. Ability to work independently deficient	
E	1. Serious deficiency in mastery of course material	E: 0
	2. Originality, creativity, or both clearly lacking	
	3. Seriously deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, and critical expression, oral or written	
	4. Cannot work independently	

If you have any issues—ranging from shyness/introversion, special difficulty in raising your hand and speaking in front of a group to a disability (please see more below)—that could prevent you from achieving your desired grade in the course based on the grading components and percentages above, please make an appointment see me at the start of the quarter. We can create a plan then to ensure your success.

*Do not be “Student X”!*

### ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

1. **Religious Observances:** Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with participation in the course, please come speak with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

2. **Illness:** Based on our experience over the years, we can report that the #1 predictor of success in REL 17 is to come to class. We urge you, therefore, to attend class on a regular basis.

3. **Disabilities:** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see me as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs. All discussions will remain confidential, although we may consult the Student Accessibility Services office to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

### **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Use your own words, and credit the origins of the facts and ideas used in your writing. This applies to any text found on the internet. Do not cut and paste sentences from elsewhere and insert them into your own papers. You must acknowledge all borrowings using a standard citation format, properly followed. I reserve the right to use the anti-plagiarism software [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) to ensure that the writings you submit are yours alone, but passages from your work can also be easily “Googled” to confirm the same.

WARNING: Websites are notoriously poor sources of information about African religions of the Americas. They tend to be outdated, stereotyped, or simply incorrect; therefore, plagiarizing—that is, stealing—from the web exposes you not only to failure of the class but also innumerable and profound factual errors!

### **Schedule for Readings**

**Mon. 9/16: Invoking African Religions of the Americas: What, Where, When?**

**Wed. 9/18: Why and How to Study African Religions of the Americas**

Melville J. Herskovits, “The Significance of Africanisms” in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990 [1941]), 1-32 (minus sections 4 and 7).

Edward Reynolds, “Human Commerce,” in *Captive Passage: The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Making of the Americas* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 12-16, 25-28, 30-33.

Scroll through: <http://digital.nypl.org/hvf/english/site/flash.html>

**Fri. 9/20: Christianities: Roman Catholic and Protestant**

Rosemary Drage Hale, "Christianity," in Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2003), excerpts.

*Map assignment due*

**Haitian Vodou**

**Mon. 9/23: 'Voodoo' in Practice and in Western Popular Imagination**

Maya Deren, "Classification of Voudoun Loa According to Principle, Origin, and Character," in *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New York: McPherson and Company, 1983 [1953]), 82-83.

Laënnec Hurbon, "American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald J. Cosentino (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995), 181-97.

Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Serving the Lwa" in *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 74-91.

**Wed. 9/25: Vodou as Revolutionary Religion**

Sidney Mintz and Michel Rolph-Trouillot, "The Social History of Haitian Vodou" in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald J. Cosentino (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995), 123-47.

**Fri. 9/27: Women in Vodou**

Claudine Michel, Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Marlène Racine-Toussaint, "From the Horses' Mouths: Women's Words, Women's Worlds," in Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel, eds., *Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth, and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 70-83.

Karen McCarthy Brown, "Mama Lola and the Ezilis: Themes of Mothering and Loving in Haitian Vodou," in Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross, eds., *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2000), 279-89.

**Mon. 9/30: West and Central African Historical Precedents**

Suzanne Preston Blier, "Vodun: West African Roots of Vodou," in Donald J. Cosentino, ed., *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995), 61-87.

Terry Rey, "Kongolese Catholic Influences on Haitian Popular Catholicism: A Sociohistorical Exploration," in Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 2001), 265-76.

**Wed. 10/2: Rara as Festival and Religious Ritual**

Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara: Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), excerpt.

*Midterm questions passed out*

**Thurs. 10/3 X-PERIOD (1:00-1:50 p.m.)** *Trips to Hood Museum/Bernstein Study Storage*

**Cuban Lucumí/Santería**

**Fri. 10/4: The Spirits and their Stories**

Miguel "Willie" Ramos, "Afro-Cuban Orisha Worship," in Arturo Lindsay, ed., *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 56-74.

**Mon. 10/7: Putting the Deities on a Pedestal**

David H. Brown, "Thrones of the Orichas: Afro-Cuban Altars in New Jersey, New York, and Havana." *African Arts* 26, no. 4 (1993), 44-59+85-87.

**{for presenter}** Ysamur Flores-Peña, "Overflowing with Beauty: The Ochún Altar in *Lucumí* Aesthetic Tradition," in Joseph M. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford, eds., *Òsun across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 113-27.

**Wed. 10/9: Gender and the Gods' Brides**

Michael Atwood Mason, *Living Santería: Rituals and Experiences in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2002), 4-9.

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Mary Ann Clark, *Where Men Are Wives and Mothers Rule: Santería Ritual Practices and Their Gender Implications* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 65-91.

**{TAYLOR presents}**

Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara: Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), excerpt.

**Thurs. 10/10 X-PERIOD (1-1:50 p.m.)** *Visit from Rara de NY*

**Fri. 10/11: Dancing Devotion**

Yvonne Daniel, "A Cuban Yoruba Ritual," and "Body Knowledge at the Crossroads," and "Yoruba Nación," in *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 14-28; 51-81 (until last paragraph); 137-42.

**{JOSEPH PRESENTS}**

**Midterm due Sunday 10/13 at 5pm**

**Mon. 10/14: 'Witchcraft,' Whitening, and the Nation-State**

Christine Ayorinde, "The Pseudo-Republic, 1902-1958," in *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution, and National Identity* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 40-82.

### **Brazilian Candomblé/Macumba**

**Wed. 10/16: Servants of the Spirits in Bahia**

Paul Christopher Johnson, "What is Candomblé?" in *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 35-56.

**{AJAY PRESENTS}**

**Thurs. 10/17 X-PERIOD (1:00-1:50 p.m.)** *"Ilé Aiyé (The House of Life)" (1989; 51 min.)* and *"Odo Ya! Life with AIDS Brazil (1997, 58 min)"* [excerpts]

**Fri. 10/18: Ceremonial Clothing, Aesthetics, and Axé**

Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara, "Inheritances: Innovations, Sacred Art, and Axé in Candomblé Nagô," in *Manipulating the Sacred: Yorùbá Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomblé* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 43-64.

**{BRYAN presents}**



**Mon. 10/21: Race and Resistance**

Rachel Elizabeth Harding, "Networks of Support, Spaces of Resistance: Alternative Orientations of Black Life in Nineteenth-Century Bahia," in *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 104-46.

{for presenter} Tina Gudrun Jensen, "Discourses on Afro-Brazilian Religion: From De-Africanization to Re-Africanization" in Christian Smith and Joshua Prokopy, eds., *Latin American Religion in Motion* (New York: Routledge, 1999 ), 275-94.

{LEO presents}

**Wed. 10/23: Mothers of the Tradition**

Rachel Elizabeth Harding, "É a Senzala: Slavery, Women, and Embodied Knowledge in Afro-Brazilian Candomblé" in R. Marie Griffith and Barbara Dianne Savage, eds., *Women and Religion in the African Diaspora: Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 3-18. { }

**Thurs. 10/24 X-PERIOD (1-1:50 p.m.):** "Slaves of the Saints: Afro-Brazilian Religions in Rio de Janeiro" (2010)

**Fri. 10/25: Macumba and "Black Magic" in Rio de Janeiro**

Kelly E. Hayes, "Wicked Women and Femmes Fatales: Gender, Power, and Pomba Gira Spirits in Brazil." *History of Religions* 48, no. 1 (2008): 1-21.

{CAMERON presents}

**Creole Traditions of Jamaica**

**Mon. 10/28: Jamaican Ethiopianism**

Charles Price, "Race Formation and Morally Configured Black Identities," in *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 32-54.

{VICTORIA PRESENTS}

**Wed. 10/30: The "High Science" of the Balm Yard, Myal and Kumina**

Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Myal and Kumina in Jamaica's Past" in *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 246-58.

**{SARAH presents}**

## Rastafarianism

### **Fri. 11/1: Rastafari Body Politic(s): Dreads, Diet, 'Drugs'**

Leonard E. Barrett, "Beliefs, Rituals, and Symbols," *The Rastafarians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 103-45.

**{DELOS PRESENTS}**

### **Mon. 11/4: Reggae and Other Rasta Musics**

Isaac Fergusson, "'So Much Things to Say': The Journey of Bob Marley," in Chris Potash, ed., *Reggae, Rasta, Revolution: Jamaican Music From Ska to Dub* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 51-60.

Hugh Hodges, "Walk Good: West Indian Oratorical Traditions in Bob Marley's Uprising," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 40, no. 43 (2005): 43-63.

**{for presenter}** Verena Reckord, "From Burru Drums to Reggae Rhythms: The Evolution of Rasta Music," in Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, ed., *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 231-52.

**{TREY presents}**

*Listening assignment: Bob Marley, "Get Up Stand Up," "Rastaman Chant," "Burnin' and Lootin'," "Iron Lion Zion," "Lively Up Yourself," Songs of Freedom album, CD disc 4*

### **Wed. 11/6: Queens Without Crowns**

Obiagele Lake, "The Sacralization of Sexism" and "Cultural Ideology and Rastafari [sic] Women," in *Rastafari [sic] Women: Subordination in the Midst of Liberation Theology* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1998), 93-102, and 103-115.

**{for presenter}** Imani M. Tafari-Ama, "Rastawoman as Rebel: Case Studies in Jamaica," in Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, ed., *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 89-106.

**{JASON and KAITLIN present}**

*Film [excerpts]: "Rastafari: Conversations Concerning Women" (1984; 60 min.)*

**Thurs. 11/7 X-PERIOD (1:00-1:50 p.m.): “Bad Friday: Rastafari After Coral Gardens” (2011)**

### African-American Traditions in the United States

#### **Fri. 11/8: The Emergence of a Black Religious Culture**

Yvonne P. Chireau, “‘Our Religion and Superstition was all Mixed Up’: Conjure and Christianity, and African American Supernatural Traditions,” in *Black Magic: Religion and the African-American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 91-120 (and footnotes 158-66).

**{VICTORIA PRESENTS}**

#### **Mon. 11/11: Rootwork/Hoodoo/Conjure**

Yvonne P. Chireau, “‘We all Believed in Hoodoo’: Conjure and Black American Cultural Traditions” in *Black Magic: Religion and the African-American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 121-50 (and footnotes 197-205).

**{MEGHAN PRESENTS}**

Jason R. Young, “Minkisi, Conjure Bags, and the African Atlantic Religious Complex” in *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), **117-31** (and footnotes).

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*Collect images of bottle trees, decorated graves, quilts*

#### **Wed. 11/13: New Orleans: More Than Congo Square**

Carolyn Morrow Long, “New Orleans Voodoo” in *Spiritual Merchants: Religion, Magic, and Commerce* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2001), 37-62 (footnotes 270-79).

**{JACKSON presents}**

**Thurs. 11/14 X-PERIOD (1-1:50 p.m.): “Daughters of the Dust” (1991)**

#### **Fri. 11/15: Crescent City Arts: ‘Indian’ Processions and Altars**

Stephen C. Wehmeyer, "Feathered Footsteps: Mythologizing and Ritualizing Black Indian Processions in New Orleans." *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (2010): 427-45.

Stephen C. Wehmeyer, "Indian Altars of the Spiritual Church: Kongo Echoes in New Orleans." *African Arts* 33, no. 4 (2000): 62-70, 95-96.

**{SHIV presents}**

*scroll through:* <http://hipsterappropriations.tumblr.com/>, [mycultureisnotatrend.tumblr.com/](http://mycultureisnotatrend.tumblr.com/), and <http://nativeappropriations.blogspot.com/>

**Mon. 11/18: Gospel Music and Black Protestantism**

Jerma Jackson, "Sister Rosetta Tharpe and the Evolution of Gospel Music," in Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews, eds., *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), 219-46.

**{NATALIE}**

**Wed. 11/27 (or on the day the registrar assigns as final exam date): Final Exam Due, 5:00p.m.;** please slip paper under door of my office *and* attach in an email to me.