

# Religions of the Caribbean



ORISHA CHAPELLE, TRINIDAD

## Religions of the Caribbean

Professor J. Brent Crosson

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RS 366, AFR 372G, ANT 324L, LAS 324L

Classroom: T/TH 12:30-2, SZB 296

Office Hours: TH 2-3:15 in Burdine 514 and by appointment (just email me at the above email address)

Teaching Assistant: Brice Bongiovanni

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In this course we will discuss the politics of religious practices in the Greater Caribbean, from Vodou and Rastafari to popular Hinduism. As a region, the Greater Caribbean encompasses the islands of the insular Caribbean, the Caribbean coasts of Central America and South America, Brazil, and the centers of Caribbean trans-migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (this course will focus on Caribbean diasporas in New York City, for example). While the Caribbean is usually seen as African diasporic and Christian, non-Christian West and Central African religions, Hinduism, Islam, spiritism, European esotericism, and indigenous religions all maintain long-standing and vibrant presences. We immerse ourselves in the complex nexus

of Caribbean religions through explorations of practices including Cuban-Kongo religion, Haitian vodou, U.S. fantasies of voodoo and U.S. interventions in the Caribbean, Hindu popular religions in Trinidad and Guyana, Islam in the Caribbean, Black Carib religion in New York and Honduras, and Rastafarianism in Jamaica.

### **Texts (Available at the Co-Op or online)**

- \* Barry Chevannes. *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*
- \* William Earle and Srinivas Aravamudan. *Obi; or the History of Three-Fingered Jack*
- \* Karen McCarthy Brown. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*
- \* Paul Christopher Johnson. *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa*
- \* Aisha Beliso de Jesus. *Electric Santeria*
- \* Earl Lovelace. *The Wine of Astonishment*
- \* Diana Paton. *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (E-Book Available Through UTexas Library Website)
- \* Aisha Khan, ed. *Islam and the Americas* (E-Book Available Through UTexas Library Website)

### **Grading**

#### **Class Attendance and Participation (15%)**

Attendance of each class will count for 0.75 points for a maximum of 10 possible points. You must be present in the first ten minutes of class to get credit. We will engage in participation exercises over the semester that will be worth a total of 5 points.

#### **Group Presentation (10%)**

#### **Five Reading Quizzes (I will drop your lowest quiz score) (40%)**

#### **Final Exam (35%)**

### **Class Policies**

**No Cell Phone Policy** (please don't use cell phones during class)

**Attendance:** If you have to leave class early or arrive in the middle of class please let me know beforehand.

**Plus and minus grading will be used:** A+ 99-100, A 94-98, A- 90-93, B+ 88-89, B 84-87, B- 80-83, C+ 78-79, C 74-77, C- 70-73, D+ 68-69, D 64-67, D- 60-63, F 59 and Below

**Please do not sit in the back half of the classroom.** Unfortunately, this is not the ideal classroom for a discussion-focused course of this size. We can easily fit into the front half of the classroom, and this encourages dialogue and engagement.

## **Canvas**

Course information, handouts, assignments, review sheets, etc. will be posted on the class website on Canvas. To find the Canvas site, and go to <http://canvas.utexas.edu/> and log in with your EID and password.

## **University of Texas Honor Code and Academic Integrity**

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, or other violations, please feel free to ask me. Students who violate the University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possible failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. The policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For more information, you can talk with me or visit the Student Judicial Services Web site: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sis>.

## **Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students**

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, you are responsible for reading your email for university and course-related information and announcements. You are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to your e-mail address. You should check your e-mail regularly and frequently to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical. You can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating your email address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

## **Accommodations: Documented Disability Statement**

If you require special accommodations, you must obtain a letter that documents your disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to me at the beginning of the semester so we can discuss the accommodations you need. No later than five business days before an exam, you should remind me of any testing accommodations you will need. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

## **Religious Holidays**

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

## **Class Itinerary**

*(Over the Course of the Semester, We Will Move Generally From North to South in the Caribbean Basin, With Transnational and Trans-regional Connections Throughout)*

**Tuesday, Jan. 19th**

Introductions

**Part One: HAITI** (With Connections to Brooklyn, Hollywood, the Bahamas, and Washington D.C.)

***Thursday, Jan. 21st***

Sidney Mintz and Michel-Rolph Trouillot. “The Social History of Haitian Vodou”

***Tuesday, Jan. 26th***

Karen McCarthy Brown. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, pp. 1-20, 80-201.

**Screening:** *Legacy of the Spirits*

***Thursday, Jan. 28th***

Karen McCarthy Brown. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, pp. 272-328.

**Guest Lecture:** Kyrach Daniels

***Tuesday, Feb. 2nd***

Karen McCarthy Brown. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, pp. 330-401

Laënnec Hurbon. “American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou”

**Videos:** Mama Lola in New Orleans

The Princess and the Frog (and other popular representations of “Voodoo”)

**Group Presentation 1: The Zonbi/Zombie**

***Thursday, Feb. 4th***

Elizabeth McAlister. “Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies”

**Screening:** *White Zombie* [Excerpts]

*Night of the Living Dead* [Excerpts]

***First Reading Quiz***

***Tuesday, Feb. 9th***  
**No Class**

***Thursday, Feb. 11th***

Felix Germain. “The Earthquake, The Missionaries, and the Future of Vodou”

Bertin Louis, “Introduction” from *My Soul Is in Haiti: Protestantism in the Haitian Diaspora of the Bahamas*

Additional Reading: Karen Richman. “Religion at the Epicenter: Agency and Affiliation in Léogâne After the Earthquake”

**Group Presentation 2: Spiritual Warfare Theology**

***Tuesday, Feb. 16th***

Bertin Louis, “Chapter One” from *My Soul Is in Haiti: Protestantism in the Haitian Diaspora of the Bahamas*

Elizabeth McAlister, “Possessing the Land for Jesus”

**Guest Lecture:** Bertin Louis

**Part Two: CUBA (With Connections to Puerto Rico, Los Angeles, or New York)**

***Thursday, Feb. 18th***

Aisha Beliso de Jesus. *Electric Santería* (“Introduction,” “Electric Oricha”)

**Group Presentation 3: Santería, Syncretism, and the Orishas**

***Tuesday, Feb. 23rd***

Aisha Beliso de Jesus. *Electric Santería* (“Transnational Caminos,” “Contaminating Femininities,” “Epilogue”)

**Part Three: Jamaica (With Connections to London, Trinidad, Barbados, Costa Rica, or Ethiopia)**

***Thursday, Feb. 25th***

Kenneth Bilby. “An (Un)natural Mystic in the Air: Images of Obeah in Caribbean Song”

Diana Paton. *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (Introduction)

**Website:** [www.obeahhistories.org](http://www.obeahhistories.org)

## **Group Presentation 4: Tacky's Rebellion**

### ***Tuesday, March 1st***

Diana Paton. *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (Chapter 1)

Charles Rzepka, "Introduction: Obi, Aldridge, and Abolition":

<https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/obi/rzepka/intro.html>

William Earle and Srinivas Aravamudan. *Obi; or the History of Three-Fingered Jack* (Letters 1-7)

### ***Second Reading Quiz***

### ***Thursday, March 3rd***

Diana Paton. *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (Chapter 2)

William Earle and Srinivas Aravamudan. *Obi; or the History of Three-Fingered Jack* (Letters 8-15)

### ***Tuesday, March 8th***

Diana Paton. *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (Chapter 7)

Brent Crosson. "What Obeah Does Do"

### ***Thursday, March 10th***

Diana Paton. *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (Chapter 8)

Earl Lovelace, "Working Obeah"

LeRoy Clarke, "My Work is Obeah"

### ***Tuesday, March 15th (Spring Break)***

### ***Thursday, March 17th (Spring Break)***

### ***Tuesday March 22nd***

Barry Chevannes. *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Chapters 1-5)

Screening: Marcus Garvey and the Promised Ship

## **Group Presentation 5: Marcus Garvey**

***Thursday, March 24th***

Barry Chevannes. *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Chapters 8 and 10)

Screening: Bad Friday

**Part Three: HONDURAS (With Connections to St. Vincent, New York, Cuba, South Carolina, and Nigeria)**

***Tuesday, March 29th***

Paul Christopher Johnson. *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa*. Pp. 1-59 (“Introduction,” “What is Diasporic Religion?”)

**Group Presentation 6: Garifuna**

**Third Reading Quiz**

***Thursday, March 31st***

Paul Christopher Johnson. *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa*, pp. 60-98 (“‘These Sons of Freedom’: Black Caribs Across Three Diaspora Horizons”)

Optional Reading: Mark Anderson, “Bad Boys and Peaceful Garifuna.”

***Tuesday, April 5th***

Paul Christopher Johnson. *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa*, pp. 146-226 (“Ritual in the Homeland,” “Ritual in the Bronx,” “Finding Africa in New York”)

Marta Moreno Vega, “The Yoruba Orisha Tradition Comes to New York City”

**Part Five: TRINIDAD (With Connections to St. Vincent, Guyana, India, Nigeria, China, and the Valley of Dry Bones)**

***Thursday, April 7th***

**Orisha**

David Trotman, “Reflections on the Children of Shango”

***Tuesday, April 12th***

Philip Scher, “Unveiling the Orisha”

N. Fadeke Castor. “Shifting Multicultural Citizenship: Trinidad Orisha Opens the Road”

Additional Reading: Keith McNeal, *Trance and Modernity* (Chapter 6: “Religion and the Politics of Diaspora in an Era of Postcolonial Multiculturalism”)

Lecture: Black Power Movement and the Orisha Resurgence  
Screening: '70, Remembering a Revolution

#### **Fourth Reading Quiz**

*Thursday, April 14th*

##### **Spiritual Baptists**

Earl Lovelace. *The Wine of Astonishment*

Wallace Zane. *Journeys to the Spiritual Lands*. “Introduction” and “A Shouting”

#### **Group Presentation 7: The Shouter Prohibition Ordinance**

*Tuesday, April 19th*

Earl Lovelace. *The Wine of Astonishment*

Wallace Zane. *Journeys to the Spiritual Lands*. “A Banning,” “Pilgrim Travelers,” and “Mourning”

*Thursday, April 21st*

Keith McNeal, *Trance and Modernity* (Chapter 4: “Doing the Mother’s Work”)

#### **Group Presentation 8: Kali**

**Part Four: Islam in the Caribbean** (With Connections to Guadeloupe, India, France, Trinidad, and Puerto Rico)

*Tuesday, April 26th*

**(All Readings are found in *Islam and the Americas* an E-Book**

**Available Through Texas Library Website)**

Aisha Khan. “Introduction: A Storied Hemisphere”

Omar Ramadan-Santiago. “Insha’ Allah/Ojalá, Yes Yes Y’all: Puerto Ricans (Re)Imagining Their Identities Through Islam and Hip-Hop

**Guest Lecture:** Omar Ramadan-Santiago

*Thursday, April 28th*

**(All Readings are found in *Islam and the Americas* an E-Book**

**Available Through Texas Library Website)**



Jeanne P. Baptiste. "More Than Dawud and Jalut: Decriminalizing the Jamaat al Muslimeen and Madressa in Trinidad"

Yarimar Bonilla. "Between Terror and Transcendence: Global Narratives of Islam and the Political Scripts of Guadeloupe's Indianité"

### **Fifth Reading Quiz**

### **Part Five: BRAZIL (With Connections to Guyana, Outer Space, Nigeria, and France)**

*Tuesday, May 3rd*

Kelly E. Hayes "Intergalactic Space-Time Travelers: Envisioning Globalization in Brazil's Valley of the Dawn"

*Thursday, May 5th*

Final Exam