CARIBBEAN RELIGIONS

Spring 2000, 11:00 a.m.--12:20 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday, TBH 205.

Instructor: Dr. Darren J. N. Middleton, 228 Beasley Hall.

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Office Hours: T-TR 9:00 a.m. -- 10:50 a.m. These are my official office hours; however, I want you to know that drop-ins and appointments outside these times are possible.

If you are finding some aspect of the course difficult to understand, never be afraid to ask me for help--in-class, in my office, through e-mail, or over the telephone.

Course Description

This course is an interdisciplinary survey of Caribbean religious beliefs. We will begin with an historical account of the origins and development of the multi-religious community of the Caribbean, emphasizing how it is built from elements of indigenous (Caribs, Arawaks, and Amerindians), African, Asian, and European religions. We then turn to the analysis and discussion of particular religious traditions among Caribbean peoples, such as Vodoun, Shamanism, Santería, Rastafarianism, and Obeah. Throughout, we will consider the relationship between these Neo-African religions and the Christian Church (in both its Catholic and Protestant forms). With the assistance of multi-media (fiction, film, and popular music), we will explore some of the issues that dominate the Caribbean region: race, history, national and regional identity, family and kinship, home and exile, belief and ritual, social (in)justice, as well as postcolonial resistance and rebellion.

Course Objectives

Through two examinations, twice-weekly journals, a term paper, and class discussions, you will be assessed on your ability to accomplish the following:

1: To trace, discuss, and outline the historical, social, and cultural development of religion in the Caribbean region, and to appreciate its challenging and varied nature.

2: To show understanding of particular Caribbean religions, such as Vodoun, Shamanism, Santería, Rastafarianism, and Obeah, through explaining the distinctive beliefs and practices of each tradition.

3: To identify and explore questions about the purpose of existence, and to consider such questions in relation to Caribbean religious traditions.

Texts

1: Bisnauth, Dale. History of Religions in the Caribbean. A Guyanese graduate of the United Theological College of the West Indies outlines the origins and development of religion in the Caribbean region. He celebrates the Caribbean as a multi-cultural, multi-religious site, and he appreciates the inter-religious diversity and sensitivity that he finds in this part of our world.
2: Clitandre, Pierre. *Cathedral of the August Heat*. A Haitian novelist provides the reader with a sense of the moral, social, and religious (Vodoun) issues that arise out of the cut and thrust of everyday existence in the shantytown surrounding Port-au-Prince.

3: Fernández-Olmos, Margarite and Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (editors). *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. An anthology of interdisciplinary essays exploring Neo-African religions in the Caribbean. The essayists concentrate on three major traditions, giving heed to the claims they make, showing how they have affected local and global culture (fiction and film), and noting how they have been (mis)understood in the West.

4: Mais, Roger. *Brother Man*. A celebrated Jamaican novelist crafts a tale about a Rastafarian trying to practice his faith in the hostile projects of Western Kingston.


6: Nunez-Harrell, Elizabeth. *When Rocks Dance*. One of Trinidad’s leading novelists portrays a heroine, Marina Heathrow, caught on the metaphorical borderlands between Africa and “the New World.” Here Nunez-Harrell presents the religion of Obeah in the context of the Africanization of Trinidad.

7: Schwartz-Bart, Simone. *The Bridge of Beyond*. Depicting “the staying power” of the fiercely independent women of Guadeloupe, this novel explores the role of “Woman as Shaman figure” as well as the redemptive (healing) power of the spirit world.

Course Requirements

1: *Attendance, Preparation, Participation*. Attendance is expected in order to do well. After three unexcused absences, a half letter grade will be deducted from your course grade for each additional unexcused absence. By definition, the only excused absence is one that is documented, due to illness, emergency or official university business. Have the day’s assignment read before class and be ready to participate actively in class discussion. Periodically, you may be asked to complete in-class writing assignments or to lead the discussion. While these assignments will not be individually graded, they will help serve as a tool for determining the level of class preparation. Overall, preparation and participation counts toward 10% of the final grade.

2: *Twice-Weekly Journals*. The emphasis here is on personal response to assigned readings. You are expected to make one entry (one hand-written page) for each class period on the reading assigned for that day. Journals will be taken up on five specified dates (see course outline) during the semester, covering 5 entry periods. In other words, there are 5 journal units, and 5 entries for each unit. You should begin your journals *Tuesday, January 25*. Each entry will be assessed on a pass/fail basis. A passing grade must demonstrate a thoughtful reading of the material as a part of your personal response. (Five passes for one journal unit equals 100, four passes equal 80....) The five journal unit grades will then be averaged at the end of the semester and count towards 15% of the final grade.

3: *Term Paper*. Specific details appear at the end of this syllabus. Basically, the writing assignment is a seven page essay response to an assigned question. The paper is due on *Thursday, April 20*. The term paper counts 25% of the final grade.

4: *A Midterm and a Final Exam*. All testing will be based on the reading assignments. Both exams will have short answer and essay sections. The Final Exam will include a comprehensive essay section. A study guide will be distributed prior to both examinations during a review session. Scheduled for *Tuesday, March 7*, the Midterm counts towards 25% of the final grade and the Final Exam, scheduled for *Thursday, May 11*, is worth 25%.
Written Examinations: A Cautionary Note

No make-up examinations will be given, except for official university absences. Further information on this policy may be found on p. 73 of the TCU Undergraduate Studies Bulletin 1999-2000/2000-2001.

Please notify me in advance if you plan to miss an examination because of an official university absence. Please inform me as soon as possible if you must miss an examination due to serious illness or family emergency; ordinarily, you will have until the day after the scheduled test to inform me of your situation.

Permission to reschedule the final examination should be sought only if your examination schedule requires you to take more than two finals in a twenty-four hour period. If you are in this situation and wish to reschedule your final examination, please see me no later than Tuesday, April 25.

Grading

The final grade will be determined based on the following ratio and scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Grade</th>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attend./prep./participation 10%</td>
<td>90 - 100 = A = excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals 15%</td>
<td>80 - 89 = B = superior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper 25%</td>
<td>70 - 79 = C = satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam 25%</td>
<td>60 - 69 = D = inferior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam 25%</td>
<td>0 - 59 = F = failing</td>
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Course Outline

HISTORICAL SURVEY: TRACKING CARIBBEAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

18 January Arawaks and Caribs: The Beliefs of Indigenous Peoples
Introductory notices; outline of the syllabus.
A map of the Caribbean islands.
Bisnauth, 1-10.

20 January Spanish Catholicism in the Caribbean
Bisnauth, 11-30.

25 January Other Christians Challenge Spanish Catholicism
Bisnauth, 31-69; 101-139.
* Begin Journals.

27 January Africans and Africanism in the Caribbean
Bisnauth, 80-100.

1 February Like a Callaloo: Caribbean Religion and Culture
Bisnauth, 165-194.
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 1-12.

NEO-AFRICAN RELIGIONS THROUGH THE PRISM OF CONTEMPORARY CARIBBEAN FICTION

1: HAITI AND VODOUN

3 February Fortunes and Misfortunes in Port-au-Prince
8 February (J) **The Voice of the Gods**  
Clitandre, 39-100.

10 February **Documenting the Ceremonial Logic of Vodoun Religion**  
No reading today. Instead, students will meet to view the work of Maya Deren, ethnologist and experimental film maker, whose *Divine Horseman: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1985) contains footage of Vodoun rituals and Vodoun initiates undergoing ecstatic possessions.

15 February **Haitian Art, Faith, and the Carnivalesque**  
Clitandre, 103-137.  
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 59-78.  
Haitian flags.

17 February **Woman as Zombie: On (Mis)Representing Religion**  
Clitandre, 138-159.  
Excerpts from the movie, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*.  
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 37-58.

2: **GUADELOUPE AND SHAMANISM**

22 February **Living Lives Beyond Africa**  
Schwartz-Bart, iv-xviii; 2-51.

24 February (J) **Unending Hardships: How to Endure, How to Grow**  
Schwartz-Bart, 52-94.

29 February **The Healing Power of the Spirit World**  
Schwartz-Bart, 95-132.  
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 231-247.

2 March **The Love and Wisdom of Elders**  
Schwartz-Bart, 133-173.  
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 248-266.

7 March **Midterm Examination**

3: **CUBA AND SANTERÍA**

9 March **Santería: Major Beliefs and Rituals**  
Montero, 1-17.

21 March **A Tale of Two Worlds: Cuba and Italy!**  
Montero, 20-80.  
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 101-121 (photo-essay).

23 March (J) **Listening to the Orishas (Gods)**  
Montero, 81-124.  
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 79-88.

28 March **Basic Traits of the Lucumi Divinities**  
Montero, 126-187.  
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 88-100.
30 March  
**Trans-Caribbean Identity: Redrawing Religious Boundaries**
Montero, 190-218.
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 267-282.

4: JAMAICA AND RASTAFARIANISM

4 April  
**God Through Ethiopian Spectacles: The Origins of Rasta**
Mais, v-xxi; 1-41.

6 April  
**Good and Evil in the Projects of Western Kingston**
Mais, 41-81.

11 April (J)  
**The Impact of the Rasta Novel**
Mais, 81-131.
Middleton, “Fictional Dread: Two Early Novels About The Rastafarians.”

13 April  
**Jah Live!**
Mais, 133-191.

Movie Night: It is hoped that those students who are interested and are able will meet to view The Harder They Come (1973), which is a tale about a Jamaican Rastaman who travels from his home in the country to the bright lights of Kingston, the capital, in order to make it as a reggae singer.

5: TRINIDAD AND OBEAH

18 April  
**The Fractured Nature of African Identity in the New World**
Nunez-Harrell, 1-75.

20 April  
**Obeah as an Elusive Category in the Study of Religion**
Nunez-Harrell, 76-130.
* Term Papers are due today.

25 April  
**Spells and Healing**
Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 195-215.

27 April (J)  
**Obeah as a Form of Postcolonial Resistance**
Nunez-Harrell, 211-260.

2 May  
**An Underground, Subversive Spirituality**
Nunez-Harrell, 261-368.

11 May  
**Final Examination, 11:30 a.m.--2:00 p.m.**

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CARIBBEAN RELIGIONS: TERM PAPER

The syllabus says: “The writing assignment is a seven page essay response to an assigned question. The paper is due on Thursday, April 20. The term paper counts 25% of the final grade.”

Assigned questions include:
1: How does *The Cathedral of the August Heat* function as a literary meditation on the emancipatory powers of Haitian Vodoun? As part of your answer, critically evaluate your understanding of Vodoun both before and after reading Pierre Clitandre’s 1982 novel.

2: Outline and assess the history of the Hollywoodization of Vodoun.

3: Who or what are the Afro-Cuban gods Changó and Yemayá? What is their place within the religious system of Santería? Outline and comment on their role in Mayra Montero’s *The Messenger*.

4: “Define “fictional transfiguration.” In what sense is Roger Mais’s *Brother Man* a fictional transfiguration of the life of Jesus? Finally, in your view, does Rastafarianism have anything in common with Christianity? What, if anything, might Christians learn from Rastafarians?

5: “Religion has always played an important part in crafting a gendered and racial identity, whether it is wielded as a weapon for repression or as a force for liberation” (Ivette Romero-Cesareo, 248). How do you understand Romero Cesareo’s remark? Also, do you think Simone Schwarz-Bart’s *The Bridge of Beyond* offers a positive and/or negative exploration of the role of women within Guadeloupean Shamanism?

6: Describe and appraise the role of reggae as a mode of transmitting the message of Rastafari.

7: “The Caribbean was the site of the world’s first multicultural experiment, the locus of diversity, the cradle of ethnic and cultural syncretism” (Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, 1). Using examples from Caribbean history and fiction, outline how African religions merged in a creative process with European Christian and Amerindian (Carib/Arawak) beliefs to shape syncretic theologies that provide distinctive Caribbean ways of seeing the world religiously.


9: Outline and critically evaluate the history of Christian (Catholic and Protestant) missionary involvement in the Caribbean.

**This term paper provides opportunities for you to:**

1. Scrutinize a Caribbean religious tradition historically, textually, philosophically, and aesthetically; and,

2. Recognize the characteristics of an informed, critical approach to the study of religion.

It does so by asking you to select some of the salient features of the information required, to identify contexts, and to show some skill in organizing and presenting your material. To achieve a grade C or higher you must incorporate into your paper and, therefore, demonstrate:

1. An understanding of some uses of language in religion, including a satisfactory understanding of basic concepts;

2. An ability to explain principal beliefs clearly and to trace a relationship between belief and practice;

3. An ability to recognize some of the significance of an issue raised, to express clearly a personal opinion directly related to it, and to support that opinion with some use of evidence and argument.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


### CARIBBEAN RELIGIONS: INTERNET RESOURCES

1: **General Caribbean History and Culture**

http://www.netcom.com/~hhenke/links.htm

http://www.founders.howard.edu/caribbean.htm

http://www.siu.edu/~carib/culture.html

http://luna.cas.usf.edu/~alaing/jfolk.html

http://www.math.buffalo.edu/~sww/circle/CL_afc.html#african

http://www.library.cornell.edu/africana/Library/CLinks.html
2: Caribbean Religions: General Information

http://www.funkandwagnalls.com/encyclopedia/low/articles/a/a002000588f.html

http://www.nando.net/prof/caribe/caribbean.religions.html

http://www.hist.unt.edu/09w-blk4.htm

http://www.yorku.ca/research/cerlac/crp/welcome.htm

http://schoolsite.edex.net.uk/49/Afro-caribbean.html

3: Caribbean Music: A Cyber-Primer


http://www.bobmarley.com/life/rastafari/origins.html

http://abracad.users.netlink.co.uk/benjz.html

http://www.caribbeanmusic.com/

http://wmbr.mit.edu/~reggae/

4: Books on Afro-Caribbean Traditions


5: An On-Line Dictionary of Afro-Caribbean Deities


6: The Religion of Santería


http://www.newageinfo.com/res/santeria_data.htm


http://www.iac.net/~moonweb/Santeria/Intro.html
http://www.eyeofatum.com/SANTERIA.htm

7: Voodoo and Haitian Art

http://www4.nando.net/prof/caribe/voodoo.html
http://medalia.net/Links.html
http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/vodou/
http://www.iac.net/~moonweb/NOSVT/VoodooResources.html
http://encarta.msn.com/index/conciseindex/05/0051A000.htm
http://ucl.broward.cc.fl.us/pathfinders/voodoo.htm
http://members.spree.com/lascivia/voodoo.html
http://www.whimseys.net/whimlinkmain.htm

8: Rastafarianism

http://www.kheper.auz.com/topics/religion/Rastafarianism.htm
http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~jkh8x/soc257/nrms/rast.html
http://home.computer.net/~cy00081.html

Rastafarianism (contd.)

http://hem1.passagen.se/perdavid/marcus.htm
http://aros.net/~hempower/angels/rasta.html
http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~bill/students/marley/history/rastafar/
http://eci2.ucsb.edu/~billbeer/rasta.html
http://www.premamusic.com/CyberTemple/rastafarian.html
http://www.ritesofpassage.org/g-rasta.htm
http://www.csd.uu.se/~d97hah/lockseng.html
http://www.preferred.net/niahbingi/contents.htm
http://members.theglobe.com/Masquel/
http://www.maxho.com/~kazakov/exodus/

9: Obeah
http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/5599/obeah.html

10: Caribbean Literature

http://authors.about.com/arts/books/authors/msub20cbn.htm
http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~chernandez/carbooks.htm
http://www.freenet.hamilton.on.ca/~aa462/cariblit.html
http://www.westindiesbooks.com/

11: Glossary of Specialized Terms

http://www.in.tu-clausthal.de/~wallner/marley/patois.html