

REL 3938
SUGAR, SORCERY, AND SPIRITUALITIES:
Religion in the Caribbean

Instructor: Prea Persaud
Time: Tues 11:45 – 1:40 pm MAT 105
Thurs 12:50 – 1:40 pm MAT 105

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

For the discipline of religion, the Caribbean presents an interesting case study. The result of colonial conquest, the transatlantic slave trade, slave rebellion, and indentured labor, the religions of the Caribbean are a mix of African, Indian, and indigenous spiritualities. This course takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Caribbean religions by looking at theoretical, anthropological, and historical sources as well as novels and film. We will discuss the development of five traditions – three a product of Caribbean and two transformed by the space of the Caribbean: Vodou, Santería, Rastafarianism, Hinduism, and Islam. In addition to discussing the ways in which the particular space of the Caribbean is unique, we will also tackle such questions as (1) How does religion act as a form of resistance?, (2) How does religion both erase and intensify social and racial hierarchies?, (3) How are the lines of authenticity and purity drawn?, and (4) How is religion used as a way to create and maintain separate identities?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course will endeavor to help students:

1. think critically about how the history of the Caribbean informs and transforms religious traditions
2. develop an understanding of the religious traditions of the Caribbean as dynamic and evolving
3. appreciate the ways in which literature, film, and music can contribute to a deeper understanding of the beliefs and practices of a religious tradition
4. think more deeply and critically about religious experience and its modes of expression and forms of interpretation
5. improve their abilities to read actively, to think analytically, and to write compellingly¹

¹ Objectives 3-4 adapted from Courtney O'Dell-Chaib's *Introduction to the Study of Religion* syllabus

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(1) Attendance and Participation (20% or 20/100 pts)

This class is a discussion course *not* a lecture class which means a substantial portion of the student's final grade depends on their attendance AND participation. Students are **allowed (2) unexcused absences** after which the student's grades will be affected, unless there is a medical issue (documentation required) or an emergency. For full participation points, students need to contribute to the class discussion. If a student is particularly adverse to speaking in class, they should come speak to me and an alternative method of participation can be decided on, such as talking to me before class about the readings or having me address a particular question to the student in class, etc.

(2) Readings

Students should purchase the following books:

Espinet, Rambai. *The Swinging Bridge*.

Mais, Roger. *Brother Man*.

Montero, Mayra. *The Messenger*.

Olmos, Margarite Fernandez and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*.

These books are available at the bookstore, but students are encouraged to purchase them online as they are often cheaper. The rest of the readings will be available on the course website. Students are expected to complete all the assigned readings for that day **before** class and they should bring all of the assigned readings for the day to class.

Technology note: I do allow students to access the readings on their computers and/or tablets, but if a student is found to be engaging in other activities (checking email, facebook, gaming, etc.) that student will no longer be allowed to use such devices (unless it is for a medical reason) and participation points will be docked.

(3) Discussion Posts (24% or 24/100 pts)

Each week students are expected to write a discussion post on the assigned weekly reading. Posts should be **approx. 250-350 words** and should be posted by **midnight Monday** on the discussion section of the class website. This class is designed to help students work on their critical reading and writing skills. As a result, the discussion posts are more than a simple response to the reading. Discussion posts should take the following format unless otherwise noted: (a) Identify the thesis of the author. What is s/he arguing?, (2) How does s/he support his or her argument?, (3) Critique the argument. Note: this does not necessarily require the student to find flaws within the argument. One can also make connections to previous readings, offer examples that provide additional support for the argument, or make suggestions for further research, (4) Optional – pose a question for clarification or discussion. Students are

only expected to do **one discussion post per week**. It is recommended that their post be on the assigned readings for Tuesday but if they have already completed the readings for Thursday, they may opt to write on those readings. Students are required to complete **12 posts total** but there are 13 opportunities to write a post. This means that students can skip writing one post during the course of the semester without penalty.

(4) Proposal for Final Paper (11% or 11/100 pts)

A proposal for the final paper will be **due the week before spring break**. Proposals should include a list of possible sources as well as any necessary background information. More information will be provided before the due date. **Approx. 2-3 pages, double spaced.**

(5) Rough Draft (15% or 15/100 pts)

In order to make the final paper as polished as possible, a rough draft of **approx. 7-8 pages double spaced** will be **due the 12th week of classes**. I will comment on the drafts and meet with students individually to go over them.

(6) Final Paper (30% or 30/100 pts)

Students may write a final paper on any topic connected with religion in the Caribbean. Students are encouraged to be creative with their final papers and to play to their strengths. They may choose to write on a Caribbean religion that we have not covered in class or on the connection between a particular novel/artist/genre of music and a religious tradition or they may create a digital project or do a field study, etc. I encourage students to meet with me at any time to talk about possible paper topics and their progress. Papers should be **approx. 10-15 pages, double spaced. Due the day of final exams TBA**. I will provide more information about the paper later in the semester.

GRADING

Attendance and Participation	20 pts (20%)
Discussion Posts (12 x 2)	24 pts (24%)
Proposal	11 pts (11%)
Rough Draft	15 pts (15%)
<u>Final Paper</u>	<u>30 pts (30%)</u>
 Total	 100 pts (100%)

GRADE	POINTS
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D/PASS	65-69
F/FAIL	64 and below

Grade A is reserved for work that is exceptional in quality, for work showing keen insight, understanding and initiative. (Note: No A+ grades).

Grade B is for work that is consistently superior, for work showing interest, effort and/or originality.

Grade C is a respectable grade that reflects consistent daily preparation and completion in a satisfactory manner of all work required in the course. A minimum “C” average (2.00) is required for graduation.

Grade D is below the average necessary for meeting graduation requirements and ordinarily is not accepted for transfer by other institutions. A grade of a “D-” is the lowest passing grade.

Grade F is failing.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are expected to complete their own work and include necessary citations. There is no particular citation style that is required, but students should be consistent. Any assignment turned in that proves not to be the work of the student and is not properly cited will receive a zero. Please visit <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/> for additional details and information on citations.

DISABILITY STATEMENT

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Disability Resource Center <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/> to make an appointment to discuss your needs or request accommodations. Once the appropriate forms have been filled out, I will happily accommodate any specific student needs.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES POLICY

Please visit <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx#religious> for information on UF’s policy on religious observances. Please note that students are required to inform instructors of any religious observances in order for it to be excused and students are responsible for any work that will be missed.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE STATEMENT²

It is expected in this course that all participants use inclusive language in all verbal and written assignments especially with respect to humanity, cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, races, and

² This section is taken from Adam Brett’s proposed world religion syllabus https://www.academia.edu/4230971/Proposed_Syllabus_Religion_101_Religions_of_the_World

religions, with regard to characteristics such as sex, gender/sex, sexual identities, social class, age, and dis/abilities. We are all a part of creating a space for dialogue and engagement where the importance of differences in relationships are engaged in a substantive manner. The goal of this class is to think carefully about the words we use and the images, metaphors, similes, and linguistic ideas that we are invoking. In keeping the vision of thinking thoughtfully about language, here are some resources for further reflection on the importance of inclusive language.

Related Links:

Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language, from the website of National Council of Teachers of English. <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang>

Tips for Using Inclusive, Gender Neutral Language:

<http://www.mu.edu/wac/neutral/NeutralInclusiveLanguage.shtml>

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

- T (1/6): Syllabus Review, Introductions
Th (1/8): Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Power in the Story” in *Silencing the Past*. Pp. 1-30

WEEK 2: CARIBBEAN HISTORY

- T (1/13): Ennis Edmonds and Michelle Gonzalez, “Introduction” in *Caribbean Religious History*. Pp. 1 – 15.
Mimi Sheller, “Orientating the Caribbean” in *Consuming the Caribbean*. Pp. 108 – 142.
Due: Discussion Post #1
- Th (1/15): *Creole Religions*: Introduction and Historical Background. Pp. 1 – 32.

WEEK 3: VODOU

- T (1/20): *Creole Religions*: Chapter 4 – Haitian Vodou. Pp. 116 – 154.
Karen McCarthy Brown, “Afro-Caribbean Spirituality: A Haitian Case.” Pp. 1 – 17.
In class: “Views on Vodou 1”
Due: Discussion Post #2
- Th (1/22): Lizabeth Paravisini Gebert, “Women Possessed” in *Sacred Possession*. Pp. 37 – 59.
Maya Deren, “White Darkness” in *Divine Horsemen*. Pp. 247 – 262.

WEEK 4: VODOU

- T (1/27): Karen McCarthy Brown, “Introduction” and “Chapter 1” in *Mama Lola*. Pp. 1 – 33.
Due: Discussion Post #3
- Th (1/29): Karen McCarthy Brown, “Chapter 2” in *Mama Lola*. Pp. 36 – 78.

WEEK 5: VODOU

- T (2/3): Karen McCarthy Brown, “Chapter 4” in *Mama Lola*. Pp. 94 – 139.
Due: Discussion Post #4

Th (2/5): Mimi Sheller, "Eating others: of cannibals, vampires, and zombies," in *Consuming the Caribbean*. Pp. 143 – 174.

WEEK 6: SANTERIA

T (2/10): *Creole Religions*: Chapter 2 – The Orisha Tradition. Pp. 33 – 88.
In class: Santeria – Fusion of Gods
Due: Discussion Post #5

Th (2/12): Mayra Montero, *The Messenger*. Pp. 1 – 80
Michael Atwood Mason, "Initiation in Cuban Santeria." Pp. 186 – 189.

WEEK 7: SANTERIA

T (2/17): Mayra Montero, *The Messenger*. Pp. 82 – 143
Michael Atwood Mason, "I Bow My Head to the Ground." Pp. 25 – 37.
Due: Discussion Post #6

Th (2/19): Mayra Montero, *The Messenger*. Pp. 146 – 218
Jose Piedra, "From Monkey Tales to Cuban Songs." Pp. 122 – 147.

WEEK 8: RASTAFARIANISM

T (2/24): *Creole Religions*: Chapter 6 – Rastafarianism. Pp. 154 – 170.
In class: Rastamentary
Due: Discussion Post #7

Th (2/26): Sheila Kitzinger, "Protest and Mysticism." Pp. 240 – 262.
Due: Proposals for final paper

WEEK 9: SPRING BREAK
(2/28 – 3/7)

WEEK 10: RASTAFARIANISM

T (3/10): Roger Mais, *Brother Man*. All.
Due: Discussion Post #8

Th (3/12): Derek O'Brien, "Chant Down Babylon"

WEEK 11: ISLAM

T (3/17): Sylviane Diouf, “African Muslims.” Pp. 83 – 92.
Sylviane Diouf, “The Muslim Community” in *Servants of Allah*. Pp. 100 – 158.
Due: Discussion Post #9

Th (3/19): Sylviane Diouf, “Upholding 5 Pillars of Islam” in *Servants of Allah*. Pp. 71 – 98.

WEEK 12: ISLAM

T (3/24): Aisha Khan, “Islam, Vodou, and the Making of the Afro-Atlantic.” Pp. 29 – 50.
Frank Korom, “Introduction” in *Hosay Trinidad*. Pp. 1 – 15. .
In Class: Hosay Trinidad
Due: Discussion Post #10

Th (3/26): Raymond Chickrie, “Muslims in the Guyana.” 181 – 194.
Sultana Afroz, “Invisible Yet Invincible: The Muslim Ummah in Jamaica.” Pp. 211 – 221.

WEEK 13: HINDUISM

T (3/31): Paul Younger, “Guyana: Invented Traditions” and “Trinidad: Ethnic Religion” in *New Homelands*. Pp. 55 – 124.
In Class: Sita Sings the Blues
Due: Discussion Post #11

Th (4/2): Sherry Ann-Singh, “The Ramayana in Trinidad.” Pp. 201 – 220.
Due: Rough Draft

WEEK 14: HINDUISM

T (4/7): Aisha Khan, “Sacred Subversions?” Pp. 165 – 182.
Patricia Mohammed, “The Asian Others in the Caribbean.” Pp. 57 – 71.
Due: Discussion Post #12

Th (4/9): Rambai Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*. Part I.

WEEK 15: HINDUISM

T (4/14): Rambai Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*. Part II.

Teruyuki Tsuji, “They Don’t Do Culture.” Pp. 59 – 81.

Due: Discussion Post #13

Th (4/16): Rambai Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*. Part III.

WEEK 16: CONCLUSIONS

T (4/21): Aisha Khan, “The Caribbean as Master Symbol.” Pp. 271 – 295.

Final Paper Due Date TBA