

I have read and understood this syllabus, initialized highlighted sections, and I agree to abide by my student responsibilities. Signed on or before the second day of class, January 13, 2010... STUDENT SIGNATURE _____

Topics in Caribbean History and Culture: “Caribbean Spirituality and Resistance”

Portland State University
Black Studies 450U CRN#44040
Winter 2010

SYLLABUS

Instructor: Pedro Ferbel-Azcárate, Ph.D,

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Class Meeting Time & Place: Wednesdays 5.30PM- 9.10PM

Office/ Hours: Black Studies Department, 308 Neuberger Hall, Wednesdays before class 4.30-5.30PM and by appointment.

Course Description

This class will investigate the historical background and contemporary diversity of spiritual and religious practices in the Caribbean, including Pre Columbian spirituality, Afro Cuban religions, Dominican worldview and spirit practice, Rastafarianism, Obeah, Vodou and Spiritism. Through the study of syncretic, creolized spirit systems, we will assess how spirituality is conceived as a form of cultural and political resistance in colonized, transnational and globalized society, and we will apply insights toward an analysis of our own daily cultural practices and belief systems, living in the USA.

We approach this course from an anthropological perspective within a generalized framework of Black Studies. We situate multidisciplinary interpretations of history and culture within their socio-historic context, and assess these interpretations, especially from less privileged and less represented perspectives. In the case of the Caribbean region, this means reading between the lines of European and Euro-American history, and finding the voices of the people of Indigenous, African, and Afro-Mestizo ancestry and culture. This inquiry demands **critical thinking** and the **clear expression of ideas**; students will be expected to demonstrate engagement in these modes of inquiry through seminar discussion, group presentations, and individual assignments.

Black Studies Learning Outcomes Related to this Class

1. Students will understand the history and contemporary cultures of peoples of African ancestry throughout the African Diaspora (i.e. African American, Latin American and Caribbean, and North American). Within this focus, will be an attention paid to the social and environmental sustainability of different societies during different times in history, and the role of spirituality in the identities of individuals and in community development.
2. Students will acquire and demonstrate proficient use of research skills that enable them to critically analyze, conduct research, and provide explanations for the complex relationships in Black experiences domestically and internationally.
3. Students will understand concepts of “race,” racism, culture, ethnicity, class, and gender. Students will be able to describe how these concepts manifest various forms of oppression that have arisen historically.
4. Students will understand that there are multiple perspectives on our collective understanding of history, culture, politics, psychology, etc. and that these fields of study themselves are socially constructed and often highly politicized. Within this focus, we will assess definitions of ritual, belief, and faith.
5. Students will understand and be able to critically examine Black Identities in their various forms and contexts such as African American, Afro Caribbean, and Africans in Central and South America.

Student Responsibilities

Please note that this syllabus is a close approximation of what we will be doing in class, and students are responsible for understanding its contents. The instructor reserves the right to make changes as appropriate. It is the student’s responsibility to come to class to be aware of any changes in assignments, fieldtrips and deadlines.

It is the student’s responsibility to contact instructor in case of emergencies or any questions related to class work, tardiness or absences.

Students are expected to attend class regularly and are strongly advised that they bear the sole responsibility for keeping current on readings, lectures, and notes.

Disability Resources

If you have a disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please notify the instructor immediately to arrange needed support. For more information about the Disability Resource Center, see <http://www.pdx.edu/iasc/drc.html>.

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Attendance Policy

This class only meets once a week. Attendance will be noted and students may get a lower grade with any more than one unexcused absence.

Tardiness is defined as arriving to class after the scheduled start time. If students have a conflict, which prevents them from attending class or arriving on time, they are advised to speak directly with the instructor so they do not suffer grade reductions for tardiness.

Portland State University policy for religious holy days: "Any student who, because of religious beliefs, is unable to attend classes on a particular day shall be excused from attendance requirements and from any examination or other assignment on that day. The student shall make up the examination or other assignment missed because of the absence. Students should make arrangements with their instructors prior to the holy day."

PSU Swine Flu Policies 2009–2010

Students will not be penalized for illness-related absences and will be provided with ample opportunity to make up missed assignments. Faculty will not require a physician's note for student absences. If faculty are concerned that student absences might not be justified they should contact the Dean of Students. Faculty are responsible for communicating basic information available from Student Health and Counseling Services (SHAC) regarding prevention and control of flu to their class on, at least, a weekly basis. Information and recommendations will be updated regularly on the SHAC site <http://www.shac.pdx.edu/>.

Faculty have the authority and responsibility to require a student who is exhibiting clear symptoms of the flu to leave the class room and not return until they are without a fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.* According to the Centers for Disease Control flu symptoms include fever (usually high), headache, tiredness (can be extreme), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and body aches. Faculty should provide alternative means of communication with flu-affected students so that the student may continue contact with the course.

Faculty must stay home and use their sick leave if they have flu symptoms and not return to work until they are without a fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.* Faculty should work with their chair, in advance, to identify other faculty or graduate students who may be able to cover their classes.

Faculty should work to create a classroom environment, when possible, that minimizes flu transmission. Examples include not passing out paper that might be handed from one student to another, or when possible asking students to leave empty chairs or desks between them. In the event of a campus shut down PSU will issue specific guidelines, policies, and procedures regarding matters such as course completion, grading, and financial aid that might not be covered by existing policies.

* CDC guidance recommends that, based on current flu conditions, faculty, students, and staff with flu-like illness should stay in their home, dormitory, or residence hall until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius) or signs of a fever (have chills, feel very warm, have a flushed appearance, or are sweating). This should be determined without the use of fever-reducing medications (any medicine that contains ibuprofen or acetaminophen).

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Student Conduct and Participation in Class

We must all work together to make this class the best learning environment for you and your fellow students. Coming to class on time and being prepared will assist in making our class a dynamic place of learning. Being prepared includes such behaviors as completing assignments on time, taking notes on assigned readings and bringing in pertinent questions for class discussion. It is advised that students bring their books to class. Participation also means listening and encouraging others to speak—especially if you are a student who has no fears of speaking, or taking risks to speak up if you consider yourself a shy student in class discussion. Participation involves active listening—supporting opinions or challenging them in thoughtful non-confrontational ways. Class participation is as much about sharing your voice and ideas as it is about learning to listen and cooperate with others—your grade will reflect both these skills.

All students should be familiar with PSU’s Code of Student Conduct and Responsibility available at www.ess.pdx.edu/osa/osa or at the Office of Student Affairs Smith Center room 433. This code spells out the legal parameters, which all students must respect, in order to ensure that our classroom is a safe place for all.

Students are expected to be critically engaged and respectful of varying opinions in the classroom. We will follow seminar guidelines to keep our classroom a safe place, including no interrupting when someone is talking, no name-calling or insulting commentaries, and asking clarifying questions as opposed to arguing. Students will be mindful that our different backgrounds, experiences, understandings, and positions in regards to various class topics make it imperative that we listen to each other. In the interest of openness, and in accordance with the constitutional right to free speech, students are encouraged to write and speak freely. However the value of judgments and analysis in this class is based on merit and not on any prejudicial practice. Ultimately, the safety of our learning environment is more important than any student’s perceived right to free speech—we will caution on the side of no student ever feeling insulted in their place of learning. *“Strive to understand first, then to be understood.”*

All students are encouraged to speak with the instructor during office hours to ask questions, clarify or seek ways to more effectively communicate their point of view if they do not feel comfortable asking such questions in class.

Any form of sexual harassment in our classroom is prohibited. Please see the student code for details on the policy. Know that sexual harassment is defined as *“Any unwelcome and unwanted advance or request for sexual favor or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when... such conduct has the effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.”* This means that every student has the right to be in a classroom that is completely safe from harassment. If you feel your classroom is not a safe place for you to be, speak to the instructor immediately.

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No cell phones in disruptive ring mode allowed in class. Our educational environment is respectful: no text messaging or other personal distractions allowed.

Assignments

Note that late assignments, except in the case of legitimate emergencies, will be penalized by a grade reduction of 25% per day.

Further note that the State Board of Higher Education and PSU prohibits all forms of academic cheating, fraud, and dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarism, buying and stealing of course assignments and research papers, performing academic assignments (including tests and examinations) by other person, unauthorized disclosure and receipt of academic information, and such other practices commonly understood to be academically dishonest. The instructor reserves the right to assign a grade of F to any student who is academically dishonest. The Writing Center at PSU has a prepared document, which describes plagiarism in greater detail, available at www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/resources/resources.html.

All written assignments in this class are expected to use academic style and provide detailed examples and references from assigned and researched readings.

The group research presentation will be an opportunity to delve deeper in a topic related to this class. Students will work in groups and lead class discussion on their assigned topics. Groups will coordinate a meeting with the Professor before they lead the class presentation.

Writing Resources

The Writing Center - 188F Cramer Hall, 53570. The Writing Center is available for PSU students needing relatively minor or specific help with a piece of writing. The Writing Center can also give students advice on citing sources, avoiding plagiarism, etc.

Writing for International Students or Non-Native English Speakers - Classes are available for students with language and/or cultural issues, and need major help with writing. Linguistics Department contact Ruth Chapin (54147) or Judy Reed (58793).

Approximate Assignment of Grades

- 20 % Attendance, check-offs* and active participation in class sessions
- 15 % Individual research assignments (assignments 1 and 2)
- 20 % Group research presentation
- 25 % The BFQ (Big Final Quiz)
- 20% Final Project/ Reflection Assignment 3

* Required short conference with Professor at mid-term.

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Required Readings and Texts

Creole Religions of the Caribbean by M. Fernandez Olmos and L. Paravisini-Gebert. NYU Press, New York, 2003.

The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz. Riverhead Books, New York, 2007.

Other readings will be made available on a reserve CD in the Black Studies department. It is the student's responsibility to access these materials and read them by their due dates, as noted in the following class calendar.

Winter 2010 Calendar

Date	Topic	Activity	Readings and Assignments Due
Jan 6	<i>Elegua</i> , intros, overview of class; Anthropology; Basic terms of history and culture; Caribbean Geography; The Indigenous People of the Caribbean. Colonization: from Village to City. Defining terms: ritual, belief, religion and spirituality.	Introductory lecture and overview. Orientation to class and syllabus. Defining the dynamics of our human selves; small groups. Intro Oscar Wao, Derek Walcott	
Jan 13	Afro- Caribbean history and culture Indigenous and African cultural survivals, syncretism, creolization, and the shared characteristics of creole religions of the Caribbean.	The Case of the Cabildo Cimarron of El Cobre, Cuba Film: Quilombo Hand out Assignment 1	Read: (and sign) the Syllabus; www.kwabs.com/king_ferdinand_letter.html Taino religion by A. Stevens-Arroyo (on reserve in Black Studies Department) <u>Creole Religions</u> : Intro and Chapter 1
Jan 20	Afro Cuba: The Orishas	Group presentations; seminar discussion	<u>Creole Religions</u> : Chapter 2—Orisha traditions in Cuba; Begin <u>Oscar Wao</u>
Jan 27	Cuban complexities: Regla de Palo and Abakua	Group presentations; seminar discussion	<u>Creole Religions</u> : Chapter 3—Afro Cuban... Assignment 1 Due

Feb 3	Haitian Vodou	Group presentations; seminar discussion Hand out Midterm/ Assignment 2	<u>Creole Religions</u> : Chapter 4—Haitian Vodou
Feb 10	“English” and “French” Caribbean Creole Religions	Group presentations; seminar discussion	<u>Creole Religions</u> : Chapter 5—Obeah, Myal and Quimbois (keep reading <u>Oscar Wao</u>)
Feb 17	Rastafarianism	Group presentations; seminar discussion Hand out Final Assignment 3	<u>Creole Religions</u> : Chapter 6—Rastafarianism Midterm/ Assignment 2 due
Feb 24	<i>Espiritismo</i> in Caribbean and Diasporah	Group presentations; seminar discussion	<u>Creole Religions</u> : Chapter 7-- <i>Espiritismo</i>
Mar 3	Dominican Republic, Oscar Wao, Fuku and the crossroads of daily life.	Seminar discussion	Finish reading <u>Oscar Wao</u>
Mar 10	Finding Spirituality and resistance in our Creole society and our daily lives.	Seminar discussion of final assignment 3	Final Assignment 3 due
Mar 17	Finals week	Final exam—the BFQ	Study for the BFQ

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