

**Course Syllabus**  
**Religions of the Caribbean**  
**1131-REL3383VC1131-12551**



**Instructor:**

Dr. Albert Wuaku

**Phone:**

305-348-0112

**Office Hours:**

By appointment

**E-mail:**

[wuakua@fiu.edu](mailto:wuakua@fiu.edu)

**Course Description and Purpose**

The processes of globalization and transnational movements have privileged the United States as a concentration locus for diverse African peoples. The majority of these peoples are descendants of Africans carried to the Caribbean Islands as slaves almost five hundred years ago, and currently involved in secondary migrations to the USA. Consequently, a repertory of Afro-Caribbean Religio-cultural traditions, offshoots of African religions historically trans-located to the Caribbean, proliferates in some American locations such as South Florida, providing trans-migrants and original residents of these places with a diversity of options in meeting their cultural, spiritual, health and healing needs. Drawing on perspectives from history, socio-cultural anthropology, sociology, and religious studies, this interdisciplinary course will introduce students to three of these traditions. These are Haitian Vodou, Afro-Cuban Santeria and the Rastafarian tradition. The course will expose students to the African roots of these religions, their histories as religions of the oppressed during Caribbean colonialism and slavery, and factors accounting for their presence in the USA. Students will also be introduced to the phenomenology of these traditions, that is, the beliefs and practices of practitioners, and the crucial roles their discourses and praxis play in shaping trans-migrants from the Caribbean and new American converts to the exigencies of their lives in the USA. Some key topics to be discussed in this course include notions of God and spirits in Vodou and Santeria, the role of Vodou in Haiti and the Haitian Diaspora in the USA, Sacrifices and their meanings in Santeria, the notion of evil in Santeria and Vodou, and Botanicas in South Florida and their place in healing and health in

Afro-Cuban Santeria and Haitian Vodou.

## Course Objectives

The course will

- Familiarize students with the origins (both historical and philosophical) of Caribbean religious expressions.
- Enhance student appreciation of the plurality and diversity of Religious beliefs and practices of the Caribbean World
- Help students to understand the role of history, culture and politics in Caribbean religious life and also how religion in turn shapes these dimensions of life
- Help students to develop the ability to use intellectual tools from history, sociology anthropology, and religious studies to explain the dynamics of religion in Caribbean Societies
- Contribute to the dispelling of the myths surrounding Santeria

## Policies

Please review the [policies page](#) as it contains essential information regarding guidelines relevant to all courses at FIU and additional information on the standards for acceptable netiquette important for online courses.

### Technical Requirements & Skills

One of the greatest barriers to taking an online course is a lack of basic computer literacy. By computer literacy we mean being able to manage and organize computer files efficiently, and learning to use your computer's operating system and software quickly and easily. Keep in mind that this is not a computer literacy course; but students enrolled in online courses are expected to have moderate proficiency using a computer. Please go to the "[What's Required](#)" page to find out more information on this subject.

For detailed information about the technical requirements, please [click here](#).

### Accessibility and Accomodation

For detailed information about the specific limitations with the technologies used in this course, please [click here](#).

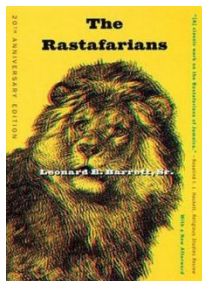
For more information about Blackboard's Accessibility Commitment, [click here](#).

For additional assistance please contact our [Disability Resource Center](#).

### Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

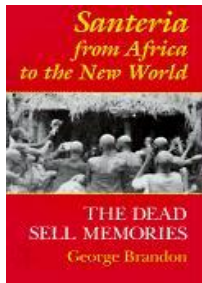
### Textbook



*The Rastafarians (Required)*

Author Barrett, Leonard E  
Beacon Press, Boston

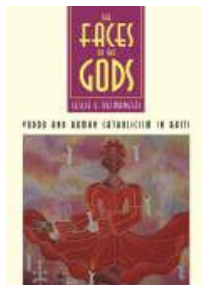
ISBN 10: 0807010391



*Santeria from Africa to New World: The Dead Sell Memories (Required)*

Brandon, George  
Indiana University Press

ISBN 10: 025321114X



*The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti (Required)*

Desmangles, Lesley G.  
The University of North Carolina Press

ISBN 10: 0807843938

[Click here](#) to buy your textbook online at the FIU Bookstore.

### **Additional Readings:**

Readings from these texts may be supplemented with excerpts from other relevant texts. These excerpts will be available to students on the FIU Library's Electronic Course Reserves.

These texts include but are not limited to the following:

- Asare Opoku Kofi: West African Traditional Religion
- Idowu, Bolaji: Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief
- Herskovits : Dahomey, An Ancient African Kingdom
- Bisnauth Dale: History of Religions in the Caribbean
- Barnes Sandra: Africa's Ogun
- Rey Terry: Our Lady of Class Struggle

- Deren, Maya: The Divine Horsemen

We will watch documentary movies or clips on aspects of Caribbean Religions

Expectations of this Course

This is an online course, meaning that most of the course work will be conducted online.

Expectations for performance in an online course are the same as for a traditional course; in fact, online courses require a degree of self-motivation, self-discipline, and technology skills that can make them more demanding for some students.

### **Students are expected to:**

- **Review the how to get started information** located in the course content
- **Introduce yourself to the class** during the first week by posting a self introduction in the appropriate discussion forum
- **Take the practice quiz** to ensure that your computer is compatible with Blackboard
- **Interact** online with instructor/s and peers
- **Review** and follow the course calendar

Course Communication

Communication in this course will take place via **email**.

The email feature is **external** communication that allows users to send emails to users enrolled in the course including the instructor and other students. Emails are sent to the student's FIU email on record.

This is the best method to communicate with your instructor privately.

All students are expected to use their FIU e-mail address/account for course correspondence. Like Blackboard, you are expected to check your FIU e-mail at least every other day for the duration of this course.

All e-mails sent to the instructor should reflect a professional manner and adhere to the following format:

**Subject Line/Heading:** Place your question/comment in the subject heading.

Also identify this class (Web Class 3100),

**Text:** The text of the message should begin with Dear Dr. Wuaku. The message should follow and end with the students full name.

**Example E-mail:** Below is an example of the format I expect from e-mail inquiries. Please remember you can also call me on 305-348-0112 if you need to speak with me.

**From:** Joe Doe doe@fiu .edu (Use FIU email address/account)

**To:** Albert Wuaku wuakua@fiu .edu

**Subject:** Textbook (Web Class 3100)

Dear Dr. Wuaku,

I have a question about the textbook. Do we have to buy it from the bookstore or can we order it online? I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Joe Doe.

**Please remember** you can also call me on 305-348-0112 if you need to speak with me.

Discussion Forums

Keep in mind that forum discussions are public, and care should be taken when determining what to post.

Throughout the semester the instructor will post messages to the discussion board that require a response or activity from each student. Each post will be graded. Each discussion is worth 25 points. To receive all possible points, a posting must be on time, be easy to read, free of careless mistakes, and appropriately address the issue(s) or question(s) presented by the instructor. Also each student must address or respond to viewpoints of at least three others in the class.

The Final Grade will be determined by a tally of points scored throughout the semester. These points will be converted into percentages [**that is, Points scored by student/total number of points [200] x 100**]. Please keep printed copies of all assignments and graded material. If you cannot produce your class material in a grade dispute, the grade recorded in the instructor's grade book will take precedent. Students are required and responsible for all assigned text readings and material from Blackboard. Students are expected to check the Announcement and Assignment sections of Blackboard for this class at least every other day. Students who take this course are expected to have the skills necessary to complete all assignments.

Note: **I reserve the right to alter this syllabus if and whenever necessary.**

Essays

There will be essay or discussion assignments after each topic or combination of topics. Each assignment will be worth a total of 25 points. Each essay assignment will consist of 1, 2, 3 or 4 essay questions out of which a student will be required to answer a specified number of questions. If the chosen question has sub-divisions [e.g questions 1 a, 1 b, etc] the student must address all questions in the subdivisions to be awarded full points for the question. The essay questions will be based on the modules, and assigned readings. The purpose of these essays is to test the student's knowledge of the vocabulary, issues, theoretical perspectives, and ability to apply the ideas covered to the understanding of lived Caribbean religious experiences.

**Essay Assignments must not be sent as attachments to the professor. They must be posted in the Assignment drop box. I will not grade them if you send them to me as attachments.** If you have computer technology questions during the semester, you should contact the FIU Computer Help Desk.

## Grading

Course Requirements	PERCENTAGE
Essays and Quizzes	90%
Discussion Assignments	10%
Total	<b>100%</b>

Letter Grade	Range	Letter Grade	Range	Letter Grade	Range
A	Above 93	B-	81-83	D+	67 - 70
A-	91 - 92	C+	77 - 80	D	64 - 66
B+	87 - 90	C	74 - 76	D-	61 - 63
B	84 - 86	C-	71 - 73	F	< 61

## Weekly Schedule

Date	TOPICS	ASSIGNMENTS
	<p><b>Class introductions and acquisition of textbooks: Exploration of some relevant theoretical concepts.</b></p> <p>Discussions will be based mainly on PowerPoint notes posted to Blackboard.</p>	
<b>Week 1</b>	<p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pierre Bourdieu's "Social Theory of Religion" in Chapter Two of Our Lady of Class Struggle,</li> <li>- The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Haiti by Terry Rey.</li> <li>- For further reading on Marx, Weber, Eliade, Geertz look for Eight Theories of Religion by Daniel L Pals.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Discussion # 1:</b> Due: Jan. 13th by 11:55 pm</p>
January 7 - 13	<p><b>PowerPoint</b> Lecture #1: Some Tools of Analysis</p>	
<b>Week 2</b>	<p><b>Module 2: The Tainos and the Caribs: The Indigenous People of the Caribbean and Their Religious</b></p> <p>Read Traditions Reading: â History of Religions in the Caribbean by Dale Bisnauth</p>	<p><b>Quiz 1:</b> Due Jan. 20th by 11:55 pm</p>
January 14 - 20		

**PowerPoint**

Lecture #2: The Indigenous Religions of the Caribbean  
Movie: Hunters of the Caribbean Seas [in the library]

**Week 3**

January 21 -  
27

**Module 3: The Discovery and Colonization of the Caribbean, the Christian Presence, and the Beginning of the Enslavement of African People.**

**Read**

- Text Readings: Brandon 37-55; Desmangles 17-59.
- Christianity in the Caribbean, by Bisnauth

**Power Points**

Lecture 3A: Discovering the Caribbean & Lecture 3B: Christianity and Black Slavery

**Module 4: Foundations of The African Derived Caribbean Religions**

**Read**

- African Traditional Religion, a General introduction by Kofi Asare Opoku (The general features of African Religions)
- Reading from the prescribed text on Santeria by Brandon, pages 9-31
- Osun Seegesi: Chap 2 - The Orisa System: An Overview of Yoruba Cosmology
- The Fon of Dahomey by P. Mercier, on Dahomean Religion

**Week 4**

January 28 -  
February 3

**PowerPoint**

Lecture 4A: Dahomean Religion & Lecture 4B: African Traditional Religions

**Module 5: Vodou : The Term, Some Core Elements and Earlier History in Haiti**

**Read**

- Vodoo in Haiti Chap. 2 - The Social Framework of Vodoo by Alfred Matreux
- Text: Desmangles, 131-181;

**Week 5**

February 4 -  
10

**PowerPoint**

Vodou Lecture 1: The Term, Some Core Elements, and a Brief History in Haiti

**Discussion # 2:**

Due Jan 29th by  
11:55 pm.

**Quiz 2:**

Due Jan 29th by  
11:55 pm

**Essay Questions:**

Due: Feb 3rd by  
11:55 pm

**Quiz 3 :**

Due Feb 10th by  
11:55 pm

**Module 6: Vodou: The worldview and Ritual Culture**

**Week 6**

February 11  
- 17

**Read**

- Desmangles, 60-169. [a good discussion on the nature of loas [lwas] and their saint correspondences]  
- Vodou in Haiti • Chap. 3 - Gods and Spirits in Haitian Vodou & Chap. 4 - Ritual by Alfred Matreux

**Essay Questions:**

Due: Feb 17th by  
11:55 pm

**PowerPoint**

Vodou: Lecture 2: Haitian Vodou: le Bon deu, the Iwa and the Human Being

**Module 7: The Haitian Revolution and Vodou**

**Week 7**

February 18  
- 24

**Read**

Desmangles, 28-47.

**Discussion #3:**

Due: Feb 24th by  
11:55 pm

**PowerPoint**

Vodou Lecture 3: The Haitian Revolution

**Module 8: Afro-Cuban Religious Expressions- Afro-Cuban Santeria**

**Week 8**

February 25  
- March 3

**Read**

- African Religions in Cuba by Ayorinde  
- Santeria: Chap. 1 - What Is It? By De La Torre

**PowerPoint**

Santeria Lecture 1: What the Term Implies

**Module 9: The Historical Background of Santeria and the Colonial Context of Santeria Evolution in Cuba**

**Week 9**

March 4 - 10

**Read**

- Worldview, the Orichas and Santeria - Chap 2: The Cuban Colonial and Republican Background of Santeria

**Essay Question:**

Due: March 10th by  
11:55 pm

**PowerPoint**

Santeria Lecture 2: The Historical Context of its Evolution

**Week 10**

March 11 -  
17

**Spring Break - No Classes**

**Module 10: Santeria Religious Culture, Cosmology and Some Key Rituals**

**Week 11**

March 18 -  
24

**Read**

- Brandon 79-185.  
- Santeria Chap. 4: The Rituals by De La Torre

**Essay Question:**

Due: Mar. 24th by  
11:55 pm



	<p><b>Power Points</b> Santeria Lecture 3: Its Religious Culture and &amp; Lecture 4: Its Cosmology</p>	
<p><b>Week 12</b> March 25 - 31</p>	<p><b>Module 11: Santeria's Religious Culture, Cosmology and Ritual</b></p>	<p><b>Discussion #4:</b> Due: March 31st 11:55pm</p>
<p><b>Week 13</b> March 25 - 31</p>	<p><b>Module 12: Santeria Religious Culture, Cosmology and Some Key Rituals - Illness, Health, Healing and Sacrifice in Santeria</b></p> <p><b>Read</b> - Fragments of Bone: "Let the Power Flow: Ebo as a Healing Mechanism in the Lukumi Orisha Worship, by Roberto Nodal and Miguel Ramos</p> <p><b>PowerPoint</b> Santeria Lecture 5: Concept of Health, Healing and Sacrifice</p>	<p><b>Essay Question:</b> Due: April 7th by 11:55 pm</p> <p><b>Quiz 4</b> Due April 7th by 11:55 pm</p>
<p><b>Week 14 - 15</b> April 8 - 21</p>	<p><b>Module 13: The Rastas: Origins, Religious Culture and Global Expansion</b></p> <p><b>Read</b> The Rastafarians by Barrett [read entire book]</p> <p><b>PowerPoint</b> Lecture - The Religion, Afro-Caribbean, Origins and Teachings</p>	<p><b>Essay Questions:</b> Due: April 21st by 11:55pm</p> <p><b>Quiz 5</b> Due: April 21st by 11:55pm</p> <p><b>Discussion Assignment #5:</b> Due: April 21st by 11:55pm</p>