Course Description
The cultures of the so-called Black Atlantic were formed out of elements of Western European Christianity and the music-and-dance centered religious practices of Western and Central Africa. They were, however, also forged in the fires of unspeakable violence and exploitation that accompanied the transatlantic slave trade. In this course, we will explore the spirits and specters of this violent amalgam – zombies, spirit possession, ancestral dead, spiritual warfare and cults of the Black Saints – as we examine the histories and traditions of Haitian Vodou, Cuban Santeria and Palo, Jamaican Rastafarianism, and more.

Course Objectives
- Students will learn the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its significance in the creation of Black Atlantic religious traditions
- Students will be able to identify the European and West-Central African elements in various traditions
- Students will be able to explain the ambivalent impacts of Christianity in the Black Atlantic.
- Students will understand the significance of the dead and the saints and be able to relate these concepts to their own family histories and religious lives.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Religious Studies Department SLOs:
- #2 – Students understand, interpret, and contextualize primary texts from one or more religious traditions. This SLO will be evaluated through Project #1 (Annotated Bibliography).
- #3 – Students will demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft an
argument in defense of a coherent thesis statement using and analyzing supporting evidence from primary and secondary sources. This SLO will be evaluated with Project #2 (Creative Writing Assignment)

General Education SLOs:
- Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted, and valued in various expressions of human culture. This SLO will be evaluated through Project #2 (Creative Writing)
- Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments. This SLO will be evaluated with Project #1 (Annotated Bibliography)

**Required Textbook**


*All other readings will be provided on OAKS

**Assignments and Grading**

Our course will utilize an alternative style of grading, commonly called “Specifications Grading.” In this model of grading, each assignment will come with clear “specifications.” If those specifications are met and if the assignment is turned in on time, then it is marked as complete. You will receive qualitative feedback, but you will NOT receive individual grades on assignments.

Your final grade will be determined on the basis of the number of complete and incomplete assignments. Our total list of assignments can be found below:

**Writing Projects**
- #1 – Annotated Bibliography (Due
- #2 – Creative Writing Project (First-person narrative fiction or long-form poetry)
- #3 – Reflection Paper

**Discussion Threads**
- 10 online semi-formal discussions.

**Revisions**
- 3 Revisions, one on each Project
The Grading Chart below is a guide for how to earn the final grade you desire:

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<tr>
<th>FINAL GRADE EARNED</th>
<th># of COMPLETE PROJECTS</th>
<th># of COMPLETE DISCUSSIONS</th>
<th># of PROJECT REVISIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>A (95%)</td>
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<td>A- (90%)</td>
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**Minkisi:** Each student will receive 3 magical “minkisi” at the beginning of the course. Talismans can be redeemed to submit a) a late assignment for credit or b) a redo for an “incomplete” assignment. (Note: Minkisi cannot be redeemed after the final class period, so plan accordingly).

**Starting B:** Each student will start with an 85% B, and you will only move up or down as assignments are completed (or not). Most of you will stay at this “B” for most of the semester, as you can only climb with revisions.

**Accessibility**

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of CofC. If any student requires assistance or academic accommodations for a disability, please contact me during office hours or by appointment as early as possible in the semester, and be sure to visit the Center for Disability Services to obtain proper documentation prior to our meeting. More information can be found at [http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu](http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu).

**Religious Observances and Accommodations**

Religious observances will be accommodated in accordance with the Student Attendance Policy. Some care has been given to avoid obvious conflicts with prominent religious holidays. However, if you need to be absent for any given class for a specific observance please submit requests in writing to me by the end of the second week of the semester so that we can agree upon accommodations.
Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved.

If the instructor determines the student’s actions are related to misunderstanding, it will be handled by the instructor. A written intervention designed to help prevent the student from repeating the error will be given to the student. The intervention, submitted by form and signed both by the instructor and the student, will be forwarded to the Dean of Students and placed in the student’s file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This grade will appear on the student’s transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the X to be expunged. The student may also be placed on disciplinary probation, suspended (temporary removal) or expelled (permanent removal) from the College by the Honor Board.

Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration—working together without permission— is a form of cheating. Unless the instructor specifies that students can work together on an assignment, quiz and/or test, no collaboration during the completion of the assignment is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (which could include accessing information via a cell phone or computer), copying from others’ exams, fabricating data, and giving unauthorized assistance.

Research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or in part for any assignment in this class without obtaining prior permission from the instructor.

Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook at http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php
Course Schedule

Week 1 (August 22, 24)

Aug. 22: Introduction to the Course, Expectations, Assignments, and Grading Scheme

- In preparation, please have a hard or digital copy of the syllabus for reference. Ideally, examine the syllabus closely prior to our first meeting, and come prepared with questions.

Aug. 24: Un-defining “religion” and pondering “mixture”

- In preparation, please read Creole Religions pp. 1-11
- Assignment: Discussion #1 (DUE SUNDAY AUGUST 26 by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 2 (August 27, 29, 31)

Aug. 27: Conceptualizing Black Atlantic Religion

- Reading: Creole Religions pp. 12-19

Aug. 29: Creolization Theory: Blending, Mixing, or Stacking?

- Lecture & Discussion

Aug. 31: What, when, and whence Creolization?

- Assignment: Discussion #2 (Due Sunday, Sept. 2, by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 3 (Sept. 3, 5, 7)

Sept. 3: What Makes the Atlantic “Black”?

- Reading: Creole Religions, Ch. 1 (pp. 20-32)
- Watch and Respond: The Slave Trade in Two Minutes + Free Writing (in class)

Sept. 5: Envisioning the Passage

- Watch: https://youtu.be/RZPBL7BDdr4 (in class)
• Assignment: Independently research the “Herskovits – Frazier Debate”. Make notes, and be prepared to discuss on Friday

Sept. 7: Implications for Thinking about Black Atlantic Cultures

• Planning for Project #1 (Annotated Bibliography)
• Assignment: Discussion #3

Week 4 (Sept. 10, 12, 14)

Sept. 10: African Contexts: Yoruba

• Reading: Robert Farris Thompson, Flash of the Spirit (1983), Introduction & Chapter 1 (1-100, focus in particular on pp. 1-18) (OAKS)
• Lecture: Ashe and Orisha

Sept. 12: African Contexts: Kongo

• Reading: Robert Farris Thompson, Flash of the Spirit (1983), Chapter 2 (101-131) (OAKS)
• Lecture: Power and Base Matter

Sept. 14: What is an Annotated Bibliography?

• Resources:
  ○ https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/common_writing_assignments/annotated_bibliographies/annotated_bibliography_samples.html
  ○ http://sites.umuc.edu/library/libhow/bibliography_tutorial.cfm
• Workshop: Annotated Bibliographies (Do’s and Don’t’s)
• Assignment: Discussion #4 (Due Sunday, Sept. 16, by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 5 (Sept. 17, 19, 21)

Sept. 17: Black Saints in Cuba

• Reading: Creole Religions, Chapter 2 (pp. 33-59)
• Lecture: Tracking the Vertical in Cuba

Sept. 19: Ritual Life in Regla de Ocha

• Reading: Creole Religions, Chapter 2 (pp. 59-77)
• Lecture: Engaging the Spirits
Sept. 21: Pathways of (Cultural) Power

- Reading: *Creole Religions*, Chapter 2 (pp. 77-87)
- Assignment: Discussion #5 (Due Sunday, Sept. 23, by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 6 (Sept. 24, 26, 28)

Sept 24: Regla de Congo in Cuba

- Reading: *Creole Religions*, Chapter 3 (pp.88-99)
- Lecture: Tracking the Horizontal in Cuba

Sept. 26: Secret Societies in Cuba

- Reading: *Creole Religions*, Chapter 3 (pp. 99-115)
- Lecture: The Social Function of Secret Societies

Sept. 28: Healing or Harming? Magic or Matter? Gods or the Dead?

- Reading: Todd Ochoa, *Society of the Dead* (selection on OAKS)
- In-class: Informal presentations on annotated bibliography
- Assignment: Discussion #6 (Due Sunday, Sept. 30, 11:59pm)

Week 7 (Oct. 1, 3, 5)  

Oct. 1: Annotated Bibliography Workshop

- Peer Editing: Proofreading Only

Oct. 3: Entering the Magic Island

- Reading: *Creole Religions*, pp. 116—151
- Lecture: Voodoo, Vaudoux, Vodou

Oct. 5: Dance and Possession

- Reading: Maya Deren, excerpt from *Divine Horsemen*
- Lecture: Possession and Performance
- **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE (SUNDAY AT 11:59 on OAKS)**
Week 8 (Oct. 8, 10, 12)

Oct. 8: Zombies and other Specters

- Reading: McAlister (2004) excerpts from *Rara! On OAKS*
- Lecture: Tracking the Horizontal in Haiti

Oct. 10: Rituals for the Dead

- Reading: Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, excerpts on OAKS
- Lecture: Recovering the Dead from the Waters

Oct. 12: Fiction that is True, Truth that is Fiction

- Reading: Amy Wilentz, *Farewell Fred Voodoo* (2013), excerpt on OAKS; Excerpts from Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* (epic poetry) on OAKS
- Workshop: Project #2
  - Who are your dead?
  - Can you imagine yourself in the Black Atlantic?
  - Can you narrate your embeddedness in a ritual for the dead?

Week 9 (Oct. 15, 17, 19) OBEAH/MYAL

Oct. 15: Historicizing Obeah

- Reading: *Creole Religions* (pp. 155 – 170)
- Lecture: Criminalization and Christian Normativity

Oct. 17: Myalism, Healing, and Harming

- Reading: *Creole Religions* (pp. 170-182)
- Lecture: Moral Polarity and the Problem of Power Neutrality

Oct. 19: Traces of Christian Europe

- Read & Discuss (In Class): “Obeah” short story (OAKS)
- Assignment: Discussion #7 (Due Sunday, Oct. 21 at 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 10 (Oct. 22, 24, 26) RASTAFARIANISM

Oct. 22: Movement of Jah’s People

- Reading: *Creole Religions* (pp. 183-192)
• Lecture: Re-narrating “God’s People”

Oct. 24: Garveyism and the Racial Politics of Rastafarianism

• Reading: Creole Religions (pp. 192 – 202)
• Watch (in Class): https://youtu.be/hakAKzMgJTM “Roaring Lion”

Oct. 26: Ganja, Music, and Higher Consciousness

• Listening: Count Ossie and the Mystic Revelation of the Rastafari
• In class: Free Writing
• Assignment: Discussion #8 (Due Sunday Oct. 28 by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 10 (Oct. 29, 31, Nov. 2) ESPIRITISMO

Oct. 29: Spiritualism, Kardec and American-Caribbean Connections

• Reading: Creole Religions (pp. 203-225)
• Lecture:

Oct. 31: Creolizing the Creolized

• Reading: Creole Religions (pp. 225-249)
• Lecture: The Idea of “Pure” Religion and the Challenge of the Black Atlantic

Nov. 2: Workshop: Project #2

• Peer Review: First Draft
• No Assignment

Week 10 (Nov. 7, 9) REVISITING HAITIAN HISTORY

Nov. 7: Viewing “Egalite for All” (GUEST FACULTY)

Nov. 9: Peer Review Complete Draft of Creative Writing Project (In Class) (GUEST FACULTY)

• Assignment: Discussion #9 (Due Sunday, Nov. 11 by 11:59pm on OAKS)

Week 11 (Nov. 12, 14, 16) THEORIZING THE DEAD

Nov. 12 – NO CLASS
• PROJECT #2 CREATIVE WRITING DUE TODAY, NOV. 12 by 11:59PM on OAKS

Nov. 14: Frederick Nietzsche and Rare Types of Dead Things
• Reading: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, excerpts on OAKS

Nov. 16: Georges Bataille and Excessive Force
• Reading: Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, Ch. 2 on OAKS
• Assignment: Discussion #10 (Due Sunday, Nov. 18 by 11:59pm on OAKS)

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Week 12 (Nov. 19) ETHNOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

Nov. 19: Workshop: Ethnographic Writing – Fiction or Fact?
• Reading: Lowe, Lenny J., *After God is Music*, Ch. 2
• In Class Discussion of Material

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Week 13 (Nov. 26, 28, 30) PRESENTATIONS

Nov. 26: In Class: Informal Presentations of Project #2

Nov. 28: In Class: Informal Presentations of Project #2

Nov. 30: Course Evaluations
• PROJECT #3 REFLECTION PAPER DUE TODAY BY 11:59PM on OAKS

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Week 14 (Dec. 3) CONCLUSIONS

Dec. 3: Conclusions & Farewell (All revisions due on Project #3 by date of final exam TBD)