

Course: **AFRICAN DIASPORIC ART AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE AMERICAS:**

Honey Is My Knife

Course No.: **K20.1372-001 HUM**

Instructor: **C. Daniel Dawson** (Office Hours, Monday 4:00pm-6:00pm,
715 Broadway, Room 429)

Meeting: **Mondays 6:20pm – 9:00pm, 715 Broadway, Room 527**

Course Description

This seminar will investigate the cultural contributions of Africans in the formation of the contemporary Americas. There will be a particular focus on the African religious traditions that have continued and developed in spite of hostile social and political pressures. Because of their important roles in the continuations of African aesthetics, the areas of visual art, music and dance will be emphasized in the exploration of the topic. This seminar will also discuss two important African ethnic groups: the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, and the Bakongo of Central Africa. It will highlight the American religious traditions of these cultures, e.g., Candomblé Nago/Ketu, Santeria/Lucumi, Shango, Xangô, etc., for the Yoruba, and Palo Mayombe, Umbanda, Macumba, Kumina, African-American Christianity, etc., for the Bakongo and other Central Africans. In the course discussions, the Americas are to include Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, the United States and numerous other appropriate locations. There will also be a focus on visual artists like Charles Abramson, Jose Bedia, Juan Boza, Lourdes Lopez, Manuel Mendive, etc., whose works are grounded in African based religions. In addition, we will explore how African religious philosophy has impacted on every-day life in the Americas, for example in the areas of international athletics, procedures of greeting and degreeting, culinary practices, etc.

African Diasporic Art and Spirituality In The Americas: Honey Is My Knife will include presentations by three innovative guest scholars: Marta Moreno Vega, a scholar, filmmaker and priest of Santeria/Lucumi, will discuss her book and film *When the Spirits Dance Mambo*; Dowoti Desir, a scholar, curator and Vodun priestess, will discuss Haitian visual arts and their relationship to the Vodun religion; and, Alex LaSalle, founder of the bomba dance company Alma Moyo, will talk about African Spirituality and culture in Puerto Rico. The seminar will include an extensive use of audio-visual materials including slides, videos and audio recordings.

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Instructor: C. Daniel Dawson

Contact Info: home: (212) 316-2267
e-mail: cddawson@mindspring.com

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Course Requirements and Grading

Class Participation (15%) Reading the required texts and participating in class discussions are essential. All students must bring to each class a typed sheet with four questions or discussion points that relate to the readings for that session. Students can vary the number of questions to discussion points, e.g., you can have two discussion points and two questions, or all discussion points, etc. The typed sheet of questions/discussion points should be turned in at the end of each class. Class discussion will be based on the readings and related to specific texts, films, exhibitions, etc.

Take-Home Midterm (30%) There will be a take-home midterm exam requiring students to write a six-page essay (double-spaced, 11 or 12 font size) on one of six propositions or questions. The midterm propositions or questions, all relating to the readings and class activities, will be provided on March 3 and will be due on Monday, March 10.

Verbal Presentation (20%) Each student will be required to make a 20-30 minute verbal presentation to the professor. The presentation can be based on a topic of their choice and can be supported by written notes. The point is to present a clear and concise discussion of the class materials and the issues they present or don't present, as the case may be. The scheduling of dates and times for the verbal exams will be discussed before the midterm exam.

Take-Home Final Paper or Project (35%) There will be a take-home final paper or project. The paper requires students to write a ten-page essay (double-spaced, 11 or 12 font size) on a topic of their choice. Students can also develop a non-written project. Both the papers and projects must be selected after discussion with and approval of the professor. They must relate to the course readings and activities, and must offer a developed exploration of important thematic issues in the course. Both the papers and the projects must be presented on Monday, May 5.

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Texts

Main Texts (*Bluestockings Books)

1. Galembo, Phyllis. *Vodou: Visions and Voices of Haiti*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1998.
2. Holloway, Joseph E., ed. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990.
3. Mason, John and Gary Edwards. *Black Gods-Orisa Studies in the New World*. Brooklyn, Yoruba Theological Archministry, 1985.
4. Murphy, Joseph M. *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
5. Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1984.
6. Vega, Marta Moreno. *When the Spirits Dance Mambo: Growing Up Nuyorican in El Barrio*. New York: Random House, 2005.
7. Vlach, John Michael. *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*. Athens, GA: Brown Thrasher Books/University of Georgia Press, 1990.

Reserved Text (R-BL) (On reserve in Bobst Library)

1. Drewal, John Henry and John Pemberton III with Roland Abiodun. *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*. New York: Center for African Art/Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989.
2. Lindsay, Arturo, ed. *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.
3. Price, Richard. *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993.
4. Price, Richard and Sally Price. *Afro-American Arts of the Suriname Rain Forest*. Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History-UCLA, 1980.
5. Thompson, Robert Farris. *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*. New York: Museum for African Art, 1993.
6. Warner-Lewis, Maureen. *Guinea's Other Suns: The African Dynamic in Trinidad Culture*. Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1991.

*Bluestockings is an independent bookstore located at 172 Allen Street (between Stanton and Rivington) in the Lower East Side, just one block south of Houston and 1st Avenue. By train it is one block south of the F train's 2nd Avenue stop and just 5 blocks from the JMZ-line's Essex / Delancey Street stop.

Course Packet Reading List (CP)

(Available at: Advanced Copy, 552 La Guardia Pl.)

1. "Table 1. Explorers of America" from *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James W. Loewen. (Readings: one page.)
2. E-mail discussion on early African explorers to the Americas. (Readings: pages 1-3.)
3. Seitel, Peter, ed. *Maroon Societies*. In *1992 Festival of American Folklife*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1992. (Readings: pages 54-80.)
4. Barnet, Miguel. *Biography of a Runaway Slave*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1995. (Readings: pages 44-57.)
5. Lindsay, Arturo, ed. *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996. (Readings: pages 171-187.)
6. Flores-Peña, Yasmur and Roberta J. Evanchuk. *Santería Garments and Altars: Speaking Without a Voice*. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1994. (Readings: pages 13-26, 43-63.)
7. Canizares, Raul. *Walking with the Night: The Afro-Cuban World of Santería*. Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1993. (Readings: pages 38-47.)
8. Desir, Dorothy. "Vodou: A Sacred Multidimensional, Pluralistic Space." *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 2006, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp 91-96.
9. Kubik, Gerhard. *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil*. Lisbon: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1970. (Readings: pages 22-36, 47-51.)
10. Pinto, Valdina Oliveira. *Pemba: Sacred Chalk of the Angola-Nation Candomble*. Self published manuscript w/o date. (Readings: pages 1-3.)
11. Unesco. *African Cultures. Proceedings of the meeting of experts on 'The survival of the African religious traditions in the Caribbean and Latin America'*, (San Luis de Maranhão (Brazil), 24-28 June 1985). CC-88/WS/24. (Readings: pages 137-169.)
12. Colina, Cino. "The Regla de Palo Monte." *Granma* (English Edition). Havana, August 26, 1990. (Readings: full page.)
13. Sarduy, Pedro Perez and Jean Stubbs, eds. *Afrocuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writings on Race, Politics and Culture*. New York/Melbourne: Center for Cuban Studies/Ocean Press, 1993. (Readings: pages 117-120.)
14. LaSalle, Alex, *Bambula*. New York: Self-published, 2007. (Readings 4 pages.)
15. Dawson, C. Daniel. "Capoeira: An Exercise of the Soul." *Icarus* 13 (Winter 1994): 13-28.) (Readings: pages 13-28.)
16. Dossar, Kenneth. "Capoeira Angola: Dancing Between Two Worlds." *Afro-Hispanic Review* 11 (1-3), 1992: 11-20. (Readings: pages 11-20.)
17. Frigerio, Alejandro. "Capoeira Angola: More Than a Martial Art." *Karate Kung-Fu Illustrated* 19 (8), (August 1988): 38-42. (Readings: pages 38-42.)
18. Thompson, Robert Farris. "Black Martial Arts of the Caribbean." *Review: Latin American Literature and Arts* 37 (January-June, 1987): 44-47. (Readings: pages 44-47.)

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CLASS SESSIONS, TOPICS AND TEXTS

January 28: **The African Influence in American Popular Culture** (Introduction.)

February 4: **The African Influence in American Popular Culture** (Introduction.)

Topics: the African legacy in early American culture, African heritage of white America, Africanisms in American musical instruments and popular music, smithery and rice cultivation as African American traditions, etc.

Texts: Holloway, Joseph E.. ed. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Pres, 2005. (Readings: Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 10, and 11.)

Vlach, John Michael. *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*. Athens, GA: Brown Thrasher Books/University of Georgia Press, 1990. (Readings: Chapters 2, and 8.)

CP*: No. 1, "Table 1. Explorers of America" from *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James W. Loewen. (Readings: one page.)

No. 2, E-mail discussion on early African explorers to the Americas. (Readings: pages 1-3.)

[*Please note, C. P. stands for Course Packet. The number refers to the number of the article in the packet.]

February 11: **Cultures of Freedom: Quilombos, Palenques and Maroon Societies**

Topics: the arrival of Africans in the Americas, African ideas about government and social structures, the various types and histories of maroon societies, the importance of those societies in the formation of the contemporary Americas, etc.

Texts: Holloway, Joseph E., ed. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. (Readings: Chapters 3, and 4.)

CP: No. 3. Seitel, Peter, ed. *Maroon Societies*. In *1992 Festival of American Folklife*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1992. (Readings: pages 54-80.)

No. 4. Barnett, Miguel. *Biography of a Runaway Slave*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1995. (Readings: pages 44-57.)

RBL*: Price, Richard, ed. *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1969.

Price, Richard and Sally Price. *Afro-American Arts of the Suriname Rain Forest*. Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History-UCLA, 1980.

(Readings: Browse both books to get an idea of the scale and depth of maroonage in the Americas.)

[*Please note, RBL stands for Reserved-Bobst Library.]

February 25: **Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas**

Topics: the art, altars and religious philosophies of the Bakongo, Yoruba, Mande, etc., the variety of manifestations of African religious philosophies in the Americas, sanctification of a secular space through ritual and art, etc.

Texts: Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1983. (Readings: Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, and 4.)

RBL: Thompson, Robert Farris. *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*. New York: Museum for African Art, 1993. (Readings: pages 47-107, 145-306.)

February 18: **Presidents' Day: UNIVERSITY CLOSED**

February 25: **Ilé Aiye: Yoruba Culture in the "New World"**

Topics: the Yoruba world view, Yoruba concepts of divinity including a discussion of the *Orisha*, types of divination in Yoruba culture, Yoruba influence in Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad and the United States, etc.

Texts: Mason, John and Gary Edwards. *Black Gods-Orisha Studies in the New World*. Brooklyn: Yoruba Theological Archministry, 1985. (Readings: complete book.)