Through a variety of lectures, readings, film and video, this course will describe and analyze the philosophies, rituals, art and aesthetics of Black Atlantic Religions as expressed through Vodou, Candomble and Santeria. Class perspectives will be both diachronic (historical) and synchronic (comparative and contemporary). Lectures and discussions will engage theories of retention, syncretism, and transformation from African sources, variant praxes of Creolization, and the flourishing of neo-African religions in contemporary American cultures, including those in our own Santeria/Palo/Espiritismo stronghold of Los Angeles.

Class Notes

1. The class will meet twice weekly for lecture-discussions on assigned readings, and related materials presented by the instructor, teaching assistants and guest lecturers. All assigned materials must be read before class lectures.

2. Students are expected to participate in class discussions, either through oral responses to the assigned readings, or through the introduction of new material gained via field or personal experience, or through ancillary readings (i.e.: there will always be room for show and tell in class)

3. Students are expected to attend all lectures, and to notify the instructor if they intend to leave before the end of lecture. Naturally, all cell phones must be turned off.
4. Undergraduate (139) Assignments:
   a. There will be a late-term take-home exam. The exam will be in essay form, with questions derived from assigned readings, lectures, discussions, and viewings.
   b. There is no final examination. Instead, undergrad students are expected to a) write a final paper and/or b) engage in a course-related project.
   c. Final Paper: It should be 10 pgs (+/-) in essay form, with appropriate citations, bibliography, or addenda. The paper may be based on library research or on materials derived from participant-observation field research. Examples of such field research might include: the description of a religious ceremony or ritual (including a "reading" or consultation with a santero, a root doctor, a curandero, a manbo, etc.); an analytical inventory of a botanica; or an interview with a practitioner or priest of any Black Atlantic Religion.
      OR
   d. Final Project: With the permission of the instructor, students may elect to substitute a video or photographic essay related to Black Atlantic religion or culture; construct an item of sacred art (e.g.: an altar, or a flag); compose or perform sacred music; choreograph a dance or a photographic essay for the term paper. The essential thing is to engage yourself in some aspect of Black Atlantic religious practice; and to record or embody that engagement in some appropriate form.

5. Graduate (239) Assignments.
   a. Midterm Paper: A review essay, approximately 10-15 pgs, fully annotated, reviewing 5 to 10 thematically related and contemporary critical works analyzing Black Atlantic religion and culture. (See The New York Review of Books for essay models). While themes and titles will be of the student’s choosing, they should be cleared before hand by the instructor.
b. **Final Paper**: There is no final examination. Instead, Graduate Students will write a research essay, approximately 15 to 20 pgs, including bibliography and footnotes, on some appropriate course-related aspect of African Atlantic religion. Previous 239 students have focused their research on such diverse topics as:

i. Masonic, Spiritist, Catholic, or 'New Age' influences on Black Atlantic myth, ritual, or iconography;

ii. The Semiotics of Black Atlantic Music and Dance as they relate to religious ceremony (including trance-possession);

iii. The iconography of liturgical art (eg comparison of the Vodou *veve* with Kongo, Brazilian or Caribbean cosmographs, Navajo or Shaker spirit drawings;

iv. Theatrical aspects of ritual performance (ie. the role of costuming, audience control, production costs, musical co-ordination, choreography) in the *seremoni* or *bembe*;

v. Sources of inspiration and revelation in Vodou, Hoodoo, Santeria a/o Spiritist mythology, ritual and art….

This list is meant to be only suggestive of the enormous range of topics open to researchers interested in an experience based approach to the study of Black Atlantic myth, ritual and art. (nb: no student will be censured for wide ranging speculation. Timidity, laxity, or indifference however will be met with professorial disdain).

6. **Final grades** will be based on 1: participation in class discussions (15 %); 2: Mid-Term Essay/Exam (40%); 3) Final Paper or Project (45%)

**Required Books:**

Donald Cosentino, ed. *The Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* *

Patrick Polk, ed., *Botanica, Los Angeles: Latino Popular Religious Art in the City of Angels.* *

Jim Wafer, *The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in Brazilian Candomble*
*Botanica Los Angeles and Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou may be purchased at a student discount from the museum store at the Fowler Museum of Cultural History. The books will be available at the Museum Store from April 2 thru 4. Please be prepared to show student ID at time of purchase. Taste of Blood is available at the Ackerman Student Book Store. All assigned texts should be read before they are discussed in class.

SYLLABUS

1st Week
Class 1/April 1: The Black Atlantic
   Introduce Syllabus, Instructors, Key Words
   In-Class Reading: “A World Made by Magic: An Interview with Andre Pierre.”

Class 2/April 3: Mami Wata: Divinity of the Black Atlantic
   Required Reading, Cosentino, “Imagine Heaven.” pp. 1-53
   In-Class Viewing: Mami Wata. Der Geist der weiben frau.”

NB: The Exhibition: “Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diaspora” opens this weekend at the Fowler Museum of Cultural History. The curator, Prof Henry Drewal, lectures on “Mermaids, Snake Charmers, Sirens and Saints: The Many Faces of Mami Wata” at the Fowler on April 5 at 5PM. On Sunday, April 6 the Exhibition opens to the public, with a panel of contemporary artists from Africa and its Diasporas discussing “Mami as Muse” from 2-4:00 PM. These are Black Atlantic events all students in 139/239 will want to attend and enjoy.

2nd Week
Class 3/April 8: Roots and Routes
   Required Reading, Blier, “Vodun,” SAHV, pp. 61-90; Thompson, “From the Isle Beneath the Sea,” SAHV, pp. 91-122.
Class 4/April 10: **Kreyol**


In-Class Viewing: “Black Dawn.”

**3rd Week**

Class 5/April 15: **Les Serviteurs I**


In-Class Viewing: BBC, “Mama Lola.”

Class 6/April 17: **Les Serviteurs 2**

Required Reading, Rene and Houlberg, “My Double Mystic Marriages to Two Goddesses of Love, SAHV, pp. 287-304.

In-Class Viewing: “Legacy of the Spirits.”

**4th Week**

Class 7/April 22: **LWA**


Class 8/April 24: **ATTACK OF THE ZOMBIES!!!!**


**5th Week**

Class 9/April 29: **Saluting the Spirits**


Tour of the Fowler Museum Collection of Vodou Drapo.
Class 10/May 1: **POSSESSION: The Lips of Pomba-Gira**  
Required Reading: Wafer, pp. 3-120

6th Week

Class 11/May 6: **AXE: Tasting the Blood**  
Required Reading: Wafer, pp. 121-194

Class 12/May 8: **ORIXA**  
In-Class Viewing: David Byrne, “Ile Aiye”  
**TAKE HOME EXAM (139)**

7th Week

Class 13/May 13: **Botanica Los Angeles 1**  
Required Reading, Polk, pp. 14-73  
**TURN IN HOME EXAM (139)/REVIEW ESSAY (239)**

Class 14/May 15: **Botanica Los Angeles, 2**  
Guest Lecturer: Dr. Patrick Polk, “L.A. Botanicas”  
Required Reading, Polk, pp. 74-136

NB: Students are encouraged to attend: *Voices of Transformation – Jazz Capoeira Sunset Roda*. Guest Speaker: **Prof. Robert Farris Thompson**  
Thursday, May 15, 2008  
Location: Fowler Museum Patio/Balcony (Upper Level) – As part of Fowler Out Loud: An all-acoustic workshop, with direct audience interaction, and performance including music, movement, and collective ritual theatre creations, this is primarily an awareness-raising event led by trained facilitators from the conflict transformation field. The *Jazz Capoeira Sunset Roda* will unite diverse individuals in a common space. Bundles of distinct citizen-creators with a particular focus on the collection of body harmonies will explore the appropriation of space in a non-political way demonstrating a model, a reminder, a foreshadowing of efficient coexistence. This is a community resilience exercise designed for 300 persons; its main objective is to increase consciousness around the opportunities for artistic practice to engage the culture of conflict. The results of the workshop and performance will spur the UCLA community to take up a “renewed” call-to-action in uniting and building community throughout our campus, city, and nation.

8th Week
Class 15/May 20: **INITIATION: Hace Santo**

In-Class Viewing: “The King Does Not Lie”

Class 16/May 22: **Voodoo Goes Hollywood**


In-Class Viewing: “The Believers”

Recommended: Any of the drek classics (“I Walk with the Zombies, “ “White Zombie”) or George Romero’s later day zombie classics: “Night of the Living Dead, Dawn of the Dead…”

**9th Week**

Class 17/May 27: **IFA: AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION IN A BLACK ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE.**

Guest Lecture and Presentation.

Class 18/May 29: **Espiritismo in L.A.**

Guest Lecturers: Charley Guelperin and Manuel.

In-Class Viewing: Scott Edmondson, “Seeking Gede”

**Undergrad and Grad TERM PAPERS AND PROJECTS DUE**

**10th Week**

Class 19/June 3: **GEDE IN THE AGE OF VAGABONDAJ**

Guest Lecturers: Marilyn Houlberg and Katherine Smith

Class 20/June 5: **Ayi Bobo & Ase**

Presentation of Select Student Projects.