

Afro-Cuban Culture: Agency, Power and Commodification

Professor: Niurca E. Márquez, M.F.A.

Meeting time and place: SASC 302, Wednesdays 2:00pm

Office Hours: by appointment only

Email:

COURSE SYNOPSIS

This course lays the foundation for a complex look at culture, its semantics and self-identification. Beginning before the formation of ‘cabildos’ or other formalized systems of organizing, the course will look at how Afro-Cuban culture, particularly the various religious systems that comprise “Afro-Cuban belief systems,” have served as refuge, resistance, and empowerment in particular time periods. We will pay close attention to the Afro-Cuban challenge in the face of “race blind” political and cultural movements of the Cuban Republic, the positioning of Afro-Cuban religions in the post-revolutionary period, and the commodification of ritual during the “special period.”

Additionally, we will analyze the link between particular historical events and shifts in religiosity, such as the war in Angola and the resurgence of Palo Mayombe (Kongo) practices. By focusing on the religious systems as originators and the repertoire these produce, we will look at how these systems have shaped social discourse and socio-economic structures.

Please note that this is a Discipline-specific Global Learning course that counts towards your FIU Global Learning graduation requirement.

MAJOR THEMES

African diasporic religious systems, the spaces of resistance and commodification they create, and the related social discourses are among the key themes in this interdisciplinary course. Understanding religion and culture as living and dynamic organisms that are in constant response to their environment, the course moves beyond simple description of the systems and their practices to an analysis of how these particular cosmologies shape the societies in which they exist.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Students will assess personal filters forming their worldviews.
- Students will identify ways Afro-Cuban cultures construct knowledge about their worldviews: e.g. the myriad ways in which these cultures create, reinforce, protest, challenge, or change social constructs both historically and in contemporary society.
- Students will discuss, analyze, and assess the meaning and effects of cultural appropriation in reference to Afro-Cuban cultures and their diaspora.
- Students will gain an introductory understanding of major analytical paradigms from the academic study of cultural studies, historiography and the arts, especially those useful for interpreting cultural praxis
- Students will experience learning through auditory and visual means and identify potential connections through the dance and music of Afro-Cuban culture.
- Students will gain knowledge of the effect music, dance, and historical events have on living beings.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will gain experience in assessing and discussing the use of music, dance and visual arts as a way of transmitting culture, language, religion, and history.
- Students will explore the interrelations of music, ritual and dance in the evolution of cultural expressions.
- Students will engage in a creative process to research, assess, and inform their knowledge of a music and/or dance tradition that exhibits syncretic or hybridized elements and expressions.
- Through in-class synthesis activities, students will develop ways to critically reflect on another's perspective; suspend personal preconceptions; and provide peer feedback.
- Students will differentiate ways of learning: auditory, visual, tactile.

GLOBAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Global Perspective: Ability to conduct a multi-perspective analysis of local, global, international, and intercultural problems associated with Afro-Cuban culture and its diaspora.
- Global Awareness: Knowledge of the interconnectedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems in the historical formation and contemporary expression of "Afro-Cuban" culture
- Global Engagement: Willingness to engage in local, global, international, and intercultural problem solving

REQUIRED READINGS

For this course, students will be required to purchase Stephan Palmié's *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition*. ISBN# 9780822328421

His other book *The Cooking of History: How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion* is optional for the course and some excerpts will be provided as pdf's on CANVAS. This book appears as required in the backpack so that if you choose to purchase it, it is included.

All other materials will be provided on CANVAS within the corresponding modules.

MODULES

Module 0 – Introductions (8/24)

On the first day of class, we will introduce ourselves and students will have an idea based on our conversation of what some of the topics in the course will include.

Task: Make sure to complete the Intro Discussion Board and take a look at the Open Forum Discussion Board.

Watch the video in the module and consider how this might be related to the course we are about to journey on.

Assignment: Identity X-Ray (ongoing). First submission due on 9/4 at 11:59pm. Please note that this is an ongoing assignment that will have multiple submissions including co-curricular elements intended to give you a better sense of your own lens and a deeper understanding of how your culture and lived experiences shape your perspectives.

Module 1 – On Culture: Major Voices, their contributions and potential holes (8/31, 9/7, and 9/14)

In this module, students will gain a basic understanding of the major voices in the field of cultural studies. We will look at the work of major theorists like Herskovits, Ortiz and Geertz, as well as theorists such as Lovejoy and Taylor in understanding how culture is defined, categorized and analyzed. This will provide the basic understandings of “lenses” through which one might engage a multi/cross/inter/trans-disciplinary approach to the subject matter.

Assignment: Mapping your framework due 9/20 by 11:59pm

Module 2 – Intro to Afro-Cuban Religious Systems (9/21, 9/28, and 10/5)

In this module, students will receive introductory materials on the different African diasporic religious practices in Cuba. We will look at origins in relation to the transatlantic slave trade, including how particular periods differed, and the geographic locations where each group concentrated. We will primarily focus on the links between the systems themselves, the flora and fauna, geographic specificities that made one area more favorable over another and how these practices have evolved over time. These will include Regla de Ocha, Palo Mayombe, Arará, Abakuá, as well as syncretic forms such as the Cimarrón traditions found in Pinar del Río for example, and Cuban Spiritism.

Assignment: Worldviews as organizing principles due 10/7 by 11:59pm

Extra Credit: Essay on current exhibit at the Frost Museum and how it intersects with our course. More details forthcoming.

Module 2 – How We Organize: Cabildos and Secret Societies (10/5 and 10/12)

In this module, students will explore the different types of “gatherings” and analyze how the structures of organization determined relationships of power and agency. We will also look at two different systems of communication and how they have affected spoken language and gestural understandings. Additionally, they will look at how the governments of Machado and Batista dealt with these societies.

Assignment: Following in Aponte's Footsteps (Collage) due 10/24

Module 3 – Religion and the Revolution (10/19 and 10/26)

In this module, students will look at the ever-shifting relationships between the official government discourse and the treatment of Afro-Cuban religious systems immediately after the revolution, during the height of the Soviet block and finally in more recent times. We will also look at the effects of the war in Angola in reviving an African perspective to the practices. The module will focus on the steady commodification of ritual both on the island and in a handful of international communities.

Assignment: Bakosó: A Case Study in the Symbiotic Relationship with Africa in Contemporary Cuba, due 10/28 at 11:59pm

Module 4 – The Emergence of the *Botánica* and Religiosity During the *Periodo Especial* (11/2 and 11/9)

In this module, we will return to an in-depth study of the practices themselves, particularly to how ritual constructs changed in response to the availability of resources and how many practices that had been “closed” to outsiders opened in response to necessity. We will place particular focus on the commodification of religiosity.

Assignment: Designing a *Botánica* (creative assignment blending geographic research, cultural demographics and imagination) due 11/11 at 11:59pm. For this assignment you will first choose a geographic region where *botánicas* are found and you will research how this came to be. Then you will choose a different location and will design your own *botánica* paying special attention to how the worldview of Afro-Cuban culture and the multiple geographic-specific elements of that cultural habitus are referenced in your design.

Module 5 – Not Just Popular as a Souvenir (11/16 and 11/23)

In this module, we will look at the complex conversation between religious practices on the island and in the diaspora. We will examine changing conceptions of race and how they have

altered the perception of these practices. This module will include an activity around *El Callejón de Hamel*, a cultural hub that centralized Afro-Cuban religious themes, dance, music and graffiti and became the center of attention for cultural scholars and tourists alike in the mid-90's amidst the special period.

Assignment: VSA assignment on *El Callejón de Hamel* due 11/23 at 11:59pm. You will use the materials provided on this very particular location, including the interview and Q&A with producer Yerandi Sosa on the importance of *El Callejón* as both a tourist location and an educational resource internationally. **Remember this is a group project, so please be sure to connect with your group with enough time to complete it successfully.**

Module 6 – As Within, So Without...or Not (11/30)

In this final module, we will dig into current movements and cultural organizations focused on the themes of the course both on the island and in the diaspora. We will focus our attention of key discourses around race, gender and culture as exemplified by artists, practitioners and organizations on the island (Alianza Afro Cubana, Afro Cuba de Matanzas, and others), in the US (Krudas Kubensi, Institute for Race, Equity and Human Rights, Candela Book Club and others) and abroad (Ibeyis, and others). Particular attention will be placed on the recent protests and how it has repositioned black Cubans on the island and changed the face of “protest” abroad.

Final Project due by 11/7 at 11:59pm

ASSIGNMENTS

Mapping your framework	due 9/9 by 11:59pm	10%
Worldviews as organizing principles	due 10/7 by 11:59pm	10%
Following in Aponte's footsteps	due 10/28 by 11:59pm	10%
Bakosó Case Study	due by 10/28 at 11:59 pm	15%
Designing a Botánica	due 11/11 at 11:59pm	10%
VSA Assignment	due 11/23 at 11:59pm	10%
Final Project	due by 11/7 at 11:59pm	20%
Participation and Attendance	Ongoing	10%
Portfolio (meeting and plan)*	Scheduled individually	5%

****Must request meeting by 10/21 at the latest (meeting can take place thereafter but must be scheduled by then.***

Grading Scale

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	D	F
93	89	85	80	75	70	65	60	55

Guidelines for Written Work

All written work must consistently adhere to your chosen style be it MLA, APA or Chicago style. The only thing we ask is that you be consistent. Students are advised to carefully proofread *all* papers before submitting them. All students are encouraged to take advantage of the University resources for writing to be found in the Center for Excellence in Writing, a full-service writing center providing writing assistance and feedback to university students. For more information, go to <http://writingcenter.fiu.edu/>.

All written work is submitted on Canvas using *Turnitin* technology. Plagiarism can result in expulsion from the Honors College and will have a negative effect on your entire academic career. All written work must include on the title page the following: your full name, Panther ID, course number, course section, and the name of the professor. All papers must be double spaced, use one-inch margins, and in 12-point font, with either Times New Roman or Calibri font type.

Attendance/Classroom Etiquette

Class attendance is not mandatory but will assist you greatly in your success in this course. This course is heavily reliant on student participation and interaction and as such, failure to attend class on a regular basis will deprive students of the needed context from which to understand the readings and assignments. It is the student's responsibility to check with his/her peers regarding missed work or discussions. It is not the responsibility of the professor to repeat lessons or announcements to students who missed class time.

There will be no make-ups for missed work. Students are responsible for all material presented and all announcements made in class. Students are expected to read all emails sent by the professor and it will be assumed that the student is aware of all material and calendar changes and other messages communicated through email or via Blackboard.

Class time is not the place to be checking emails, texts, watching TV shows, or being on social media. Please be respectful, not just of the person presenting, but also of your classmates near you. If we see that there is an abuse of electronics, we will deduct points from your participation grade.

Religious Observances

Every effort will be made, where feasible and practical, to accommodate students whose religious practices coincide with class requirements or scheduling. Please make sure to notify your instructor *at the beginning of the semester* of which dates you will be absent or any anticipated problems with completing course work.

Disability Resources

Students with disabilities who feel they may need accommodations in class should visit the Office of Disability Services (website: <http://drc.fiu.edu>) and ensure the appropriate accommodations. Please be certain to present your instructor with the documentation as soon as possible.

Academic Misconduct Policy

Registration in this course implies an acceptance of and compliance with the Honors College policies for students and the FIU Code of Academic Integrity. Please refer to the following documents for additional information:

Honors College Policies and Requirements

Academic Misconduct Procedures and Policies

In The Honors College, the term “honor” refers both to academic accomplishment and character. Students in Honors should therefore adhere to and be held to the highest standards of personal academic accountability. Academic dishonesty in any form, including plagiarism, is antithetical to the very definition of being an Honors student at FIU. Consequently, an Honors College student found responsible for academic misconduct will be dismissed from the College.

An Honors faculty member may bring charges of academic misconduct against an Honors student if the faculty member suspects plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct. The faculty member will decide whether to pursue informal resolution, file formal resolution charges, or take no further action and will follow the procedures outlined in the Academic Misconduct Procedures available at <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/get-support/student-conduct-and-academic-integrity/academic-integrity/index.php> . Please refer to the following documents for additional information: FIU Student Handbook: <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/about/student-handbook/index.php>

Student Portfolios

The Honors College will be using a portfolio method to assess students’ learning outcomes. The portfolio allows for maximum flexibility in gauging student learning. Students decide (with instructor consultation) what “artifacts” or assignments to include for consideration in their portfolios to demonstrate successful achievement of each of five key student learning outcomes over the 4-year Honors experience. Portfolios provide a rich context for students to show what

they have learned and to explain their learning process. Because the Honors curriculum is meant to be thought-provoking and reflective, student self-assessment through portfolios will facilitate learning and provide in-depth assessment. Each Honors College course includes at least one assignment that could potentially fit portfolio requirements. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/portfolio/>

Honors Education in the Arts (HEARTS)

The HEARTS program is designed to give Honors College students opportunities to “explore and appreciate different artistic and cultural traditions and modes of artistic expression. HEARTS will also serve as a clearinghouse (and curatorial framework) for our students to experience the arts on campus and in the community by providing them with information about cultural activities and access to performances with free or discounted tickets.” <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/hearts/>

Resources:

Panthers Care & Counseling & Psychological Services

If you are looking for help for yourself or a fellow classmate, Panthers Care encourages you to express any concerns you may come across as it relates to any personal behavior concerns or worries you have, for the classmate’s well-being or yours; you are encouraged to share your concerns with FIU’s Panthers Care website.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers free and confidential help for anxiety, depression, stress, and other concerns that life brings. Learn more about CAPS at caps.fiu.edu. Professional counselors are available for same-day appointments. Don’t wait to call 305-348-2277 to set up a time to talk or visit the online self-help portal.

PLEASE NOTE: Academic freedom and responsibility are essential to the integrity of the University. The principles of academic freedom are integral to the conception of the University as a community of scholars engaged in the pursuit of truth and the communication of knowledge in an atmosphere of tolerance and freedom. The University serves the common good through teaching, research, scholarship/creative activities, and service. The fulfillment of these functions rests upon the preservation of the intellectual freedoms of teaching, expression, research, and debate. We affirm that academic freedom is a protected right in addition to a faculty member’s constitutionally protected freedom of expression and is fundamental to the faculty member’s responsibility to seek and to state truth as he or she sees it.

Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on data and verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint or belief.