AAST 300: Voodoo & Visual Culture

Entire Course is held online, via OAKS

Contact Information:

| 📩 | Instructor: Dr. Kameelah Martin | Email: MARTINKL2@cofc.edu |
|📍 | Office: 207C ECTR | Office Hours: T/TH 1-3pm, or make an appointment via email |
|📞 | Use: MARTINKL2@cofc.edu to request a hangout session | Phone: (843) 953-0675 |

What will we learn?
The late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen an influx of literature, films, and other visual media that takes people of African descent and African-based religion as its focus. Fiction, graphic novels, animated feature films, and even artwork have made contributions to African-based spirituality in popular culture and this course will explore the nuances of texts—visual and print—that focus primarily on Voodoo in Black Atlantic literature and culture. This class, taking literary studies as the foundation, is designed to both introduce students to African-based religion practiced in the Americas and to exam the role of visual iconography in such religions.

How do we “read” visual representations of Voodoo? We will engage current research, contemporary fiction, and other critical resources to assess how visual culture and spirituality function together. We will consider such topics as representation and body politics; gender performance and the negotiation of power; spiritual authority and religious syncretization; as well as sexuality, authenticity, and ancestral reverence. This course has strong reading and writing components.

Course Goals:
- To gain critical knowledge of African-based spirituality, its cultural and historical context, key themes, and conventions
- To evaluate the place of visual rhetoric in popular images of African spirituality
- To synthesize and apply critical thinking, cultural theory, and/or discipline specific approaches to the course texts/images during class discussion and written assignments

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To develop research and writing skills applicable to a major/minor in African Diaspora Studies

What Materials are Required?

**Texts:** *Available online via OAKS*

*Tell My Horse* (1938), Zora Neale Hurston
*Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santeria* (1998), Marta Moreno Vega
*Abeng* (1995), Michelle Cliff
“Tracing the Spirit” Karen McCarthy Brown*
*New Orleans Voodoo Tarot*, Louis Martinie & Sally Ann Glassman*
Excerpts of *Spiritual Merchants: Religion, Magic, & Commerce* Carolyn Morrow Long*

**Required Screenings:** *(Films will be accessible via OAKS)*

*Divine Horsemen* (Maya Deren, 1940)
*Lemonade: Visual Album* (Beyoncé, 2016)
*The King Does Not Lie: The Initiation of a Priest of Shango* (Judith Gleason, 1993)
*The United States of Hoodoo* (Oliver Hardt, 2012)

**Hardware**

★ A computer with Internet access, a sound card, microphone, and speakers.
  o You must have a **reliable** Internet connection. Having to rely on the public library or Starbucks, for example, will likely make it challenging to have a consistent presence inside OAKS. If you are concerned, please contact me within the first week so we can determine if this course will be manageable for you.

★ A webcam is recommended, but not required

★ A headset or earphones (optional)

**Software**

★ **Adobe Reader** (free)
★ **Adobe Flash Player** (free)
★ Word processing software (such as Microsoft Word, which you can download for free as a CofC student by clicking [here](#))
★ **Chrome** or **Firefox** Internet browsers (I strongly recommend you do not use Internet Explorer)

★ **Google Hangouts**: Hangouts is Google’s version of Skype, allowing us to communicate “face-to-face” as needed. Follow these steps ([click here](#)) to start a Hangout. This is an optional way to communicate with me. Refer to the section below on “communication.”

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Required Course Assignments:

- Quizzes: 10%
- Comparative Analysis: 15%
- Discussion board/Participation: 20%
- Critical Reading Responses/Activities: 20%
- Textual Analysis Essay: 15%
- Final Projects: 20%

Total: 100%

How Will I Earn My Grade?
College is designed to be challenging and grades are earned, not given.

- A grade of “C” is earned by students who complete average college work. Grades in the “B” range signify work that stands above the average. Grades in the “A” range are earned by students who do exceptional work and go ABOVE and BEYOND. Will you go above and beyond? I hope so and I want to help you achieve this!
- Students often expect a higher grade because they “worked hard.” This will be my response if you tell me you worked hard: “That’s fantastic! I hope you continue to work diligently. Let’s talk about strategies to make your efforts more successful.” I expect you to put forth considerable effort to produce work that reflects your intellectual and creative capabilities.
- If you are having difficulty with the class, please ask me for help. I want you to succeed, but I won’t be able to help if you ask for assistance the night before an assignment is due. Also, waiting until the end of the semester to express concern with your grade will not allow me to assist you.
- I also use the OAKS gradebook, but will not update it immediately after every assignment is returned. So you should keep track of the points you earn during the semester so you always know how you’re progressing.
- Please do not ask your parents to contact me regarding your grades. You are responsible for your grades, not your parents. Furthermore, federal legislation (FERPA) prohibits me from discussing your academic record with your family.

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Communication: How Should I Communicate with the Instructor?

Ask Three, Then Me!

I receive hundreds of emails every week, many from students asking questions that could easily be answered by reading the syllabus or asking a classmate. Thus, before emailing me, please follow these steps:

1. Consult the class schedule and syllabus.
2. Check OAKS for announcements and instructions, including the Course Lounge discussion board.
3. Confer with three classmates.

If you still don’t know the answer to your question, you may email me directly at martinkl2@cofc.edu.

Email:

Most organizations are dependent on email for internal and external communications. The way you present yourself in emails says a lot about your work ethic and your priorities. When corresponding with me, please:

★ Include AAST 300 DE in the subject line
★ include a respectful greeting (e.g., “Hi Dr. Martin” or “Dear Dr. Martin”)
★ fully sign your name
★ use complete sentences
★ proofread your email

Typically, I will respond to your email within 24 hours, although my response time will be slower on weekends (24–36 hours). I stop responding to emails after 8pm. If you do not receive a reply within 48 hours, please re-send your message (unless, of course, you haven’t followed the “ask three, then me” policy).

Face to Face Meetings:

If an email will not suffice, I’d be happy to chat face-to-face. For those who are local, you are more than welcome to meet with me in my office: 207C ECTR. If, however, you are not able to meet in person, we can chat via Google Hangouts. If you don’t have a webcam, we can use the chat feature inside OAKS. Please be sure to schedule face to face meetings at least 24–48 hours in advance to ensure availability.

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What Do You Expect from Me?
Please review the following policies to ensure that you have a clear understanding of what I expect from every student.

Course Structure:
This course will be taught exclusively online via OAKS. All course materials are available and assignments will be uploaded and graded via OAKS. It is your responsibility to make sure your account is functioning! This course contains ten learning modules or units, including the Orientation unit. Each module represents a unit of instruction taking place over the course of one week—in a few instances, two weeks will be allotted. The course modules are located in the Content tool in OAKS. Everything you need for instruction is located inside each module (required reading, assignments, lectures, etc.)

Schedule:
The course will be conducted asynchronously via OAKS; however, it is NOT self-paced. That means you can work through each module at your own pace, but you will not be able to move on to the next module until it is opened to the entire class. A new module will open on Tuesdays—in accordance with the course schedule. Also, due to the collaborative nature of the course, there are due dates assigned to the learning activities that must be met.

Modules open on Tuesdays at 12:00 a.m. EST and will remain open for the duration of the course. Begin with the Module Checklist and proceed sequentially through the content listed. Most major assignments are due on Mondays by 11:59 p.m. EST (see course schedule for specific dates).

How can I be successful in this Course?
★ Log into OAKS a minimum of 4 days a week. Be an active learner and participant in our online community. Set a weekly schedule for this course as with your other courses; put it in your calendar and have dedicated time to work on this course. I recommend 5–7 hours a week to complete reading, lectures, and other assignments.
★ Maintain your virtual presence—this entire experience will be a bore if students are not willing to participate in discussion boards and other activities meant to

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keep the course interesting. Don’t troll—let us know you are present by being an active participant in the class. Besides, part of your grade relies on this.
★ Don’t let the digital realm fool you — this course will cover the same amount of material as in a face to face course and will likely be more challenging in a digital environment. Please expect the same academic rigor in this course as in any other -- perhaps even more.
★ Time management is key. Procrastination is your enemy. Students tend to wait until the last possible moment to complete and submit work. This is the easiest way to fall behind in class and sabotage your grade. Don’t be that person. Stay AHEAD of the course schedule.

★ Use technology to your advantage—OAKS, smart phones, and cloud services allow us to stay organized with numerous apps, sync ability, reminders, alerts, etc. Please make use of all the technology to help you stay on task.

Discussion Boards:
The OAKS Discussion forums are the first place you should visit when you have questions related to the course. For general questions about the course, schedule, assignments, etc. please post questions to the Course Lounge Discussion Board. You are highly encouraged to respond to other participants’ questions if you know the answer to their query.

All content-related questions should be posted to the Module Specific Discussion Boards. This is where you post questions, comments, and ideas related to the information shared in each module.

Discussion Board Decorum:
- Students are required to post to the module specific discussion boards for part of their participation grade. The discussion threads will be associated with each module and a specific required reading/viewing.
- Discussion posts are due on Thursdays by 11:59pm.
- You are also required to respond to three of your peers’ comments. Responses are due on Mondays at 11:59pm.
- Remember it is good netiquette to subscribe to and maintain the discussion in threads you create.
  - Discussion boards are a place for you to reflect and respond to what you have learned by reading/reviewing the required course material. I will provide an open-ended topic to start the discussion — be sure to address the question in your response!
  - Comments should be substantive, not simply suggesting that a reading was “good”. You will need to explain your position/opinion and support

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Submitting Assignments

✩ All written assignments should be submitted electronically to the Drop Box in OAKS.

✩ They should be saved as PDFs and include your first and last name in the file.

Assignments that are emailed, left in my mailbox, slid under my office door, or have file extensions other than .pdf will not be accepted.

✩ Murphy’s Law: “Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.” Laptops are stolen. Hard drives crash. Your wireless connection fails. So, do not wait until the last minute to submit your assignments and SAVE OFTEN.

✩ Always save duplicates of your work on an external source (e.g., thumb drive, Google Drive, Dropbox.com). Every single semester, a student loses their work because of a hard drive crash or the Library computer logging off unexpectedly.

Attendance:

Just like any organization, this class is a community whose success is dependent on everyone’s participation. Your performance is tied to how frequently you log into the course and how actively you participate.

Failure to participate in our OAKS class for ten (10) days in a row during any point in the semester will result in a WA, which is equivalent to failing the course.

Please keep in mind that OAKS allows me to view your online activity. This includes number of logins, materials accessed, and time spent.

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For your protection, keep all assignments that are graded and handed back to you until final grades have been submitted at the end of the semester.

**Late Work**
I expect you to treat this class like a job and deadlines must be met. **LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.** Please don’t make things awkward by asking for an extension.

- Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due by 11:59 PM EST on the due date listed in the course schedule.
  - If you are in a time zone other than EST, make sure you pay very close attention to dates/times. I recommend changing your time zone setting in OAKS to EST to prevent confusion. You can accomplish this by clicking on your name in the upper right corner of OAKS, then choose Account Settings.
- If extraordinary circumstances arise (e.g., hospitalization), notify me as soon as possible so arrangements can be made.
- If you know you will not have access to OAKS when an assignment is due, it is your responsibility to turn it in the assignment early.

**Classroom Etiquette:**
The classroom is first and foremost a learning environment. Students should feel safe and comfortable to speak freely on their ideas and opinions. We will be courteous to each other and display the utmost respect for everyone in the class. I will not tolerate profane, distasteful, or discriminatory language even in an online environment. Conduct your netiquette accordingly!

**Netiquette** is a combination of the words “network” and “etiquette” and refers to codes of online conduct. Because online communication generally lacks visual cues present in face-to-face interactions, misunderstandings and conflict can easily arise. Thus, please abide by the following netiquette rules when communicating with me and your peers during this class:

- **★★ Tend your threads.** If you post a question or comment to the discussion boards, reply to everyone who has contributed to the conversation you started.
- **★★ Use appropriate capitalization.** Using all capital letters is the equivalent of yelling (aside from acronyms).
- **★★ Be mindful of “flames”** - These are outbursts of extreme emotion or opinion.
- **★★ Think before you hit the post (enter/reply) button.** Once posted, you can't take it back!
- **★★ Use clear subject lines in emails and discussion board posts.**

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Use abbreviations or acronyms only if the entire class knows them. If not, define them. Avoid distasteful acronyms used in texts and social media. This is not the appropriate space for it.

Be forgiving. Anyone can make a mistake. We’re all learning together.

Keep the dialog collegial and professional. We each have different teaching philosophies and opinions about online education. We do not have to agree to learn from one another or engage in discussion.

Technical Difficulties:
If you have questions or problems related to the course, please follow the communication procedures noted above. If you have technical problems, please contact Student Computing Support or Helpdesk using these methods:

- **Student Computing Support**
  - 843-953-5457
  - studentcomputingsupport@cofc.edu
  - blogs.cofc.edu/scs

- **Helpdesk**
  - 843-953-3375
  - helpdesk@cofc.edu
  - it.cofc.edu/help/helpdesk

It’s important to resolve technical problems swiftly, so do not delay getting support.

- **Please Note:** Computer failure/unavailability and internet inconsistency/unavailability do not constitute an excuse for not completing assignments by the due dates.

**American Disabilities Act:**

The College of Charleston is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities, as required under federal law. Students who require academic adjustments in the classroom should apply at the Center for Disability Services / SNAP, located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104.

- Students with approved SNAP accommodations must email me the Professor Notification Letter and discuss your needs during the first week of class via email or a phone call. I want you to be successful, so please talk with me!

- Students approved to receive accommodations are responsible for contacting me at least one week before any accommodation is needed. Please plan ahead.
Course Schedule:
- Each module will open on a Tuesday; Major assignments are due the following Monday except where two week intervals are noted.

Unit One: Course Introduction (Week 1)
See: Instructor Introduction video
Read: Course Syllabus, Academic Honesty Policy, Turnitin.com Statement,
Apply: Complete Syllabus Quiz, Post “Selfie” Introduction Video (via Flipgrid),
complete Academic honesty quiz, complete Word Association Activity
Due Date: **Monday Jan 14, 2019**

Unit Two: Defining Visual Literacy (Week 2)
See: Presentation, “What is Visual Literacy?”
  *United States of Hoodoo* (1hr 40 minutes)
Read: Karen McCarthy Brown, “The Art of Transformation” (PDF)
Apply: Complete Visual Literacy quiz, Post to discussion board, complete critical reading response
Due Date: **Monday Jan. 21, 2019**

Unit Three: Defining African Spirituality (Week 3)
See: Intro to African Spirituality lecture via Voicethread
Read: Carolyn Morrow Long, Ch. 1 “African Origins and European Influences”
  Ch. 2 “African-Based Religions in Latin-Catholic Colonies”
Apply: Complete quiz, Post to discussion board, respond to Voicethread lecture
Due Date: **Monday Jan. 28, 2019**

Unit Four: Engaging Haitian Vodou Aesthetics (Weeks 4–5)
See: Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti (50 minutes)
  Haitian Vodou Slide slide show (Voicethread)
Read: Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* Ch. 4, 10–12, and 13–17
  Visual Analysis assignment instructions
Apply: Post to discussion board, respond to Voicethread, critical reading response, submit visual analysis assignment.
Due Date: **Monday February 11, 2019**

Unit Five: Afro-LatinX: Lucumi, Espiritismo & Iconography (Week 6–7)
See: *The King Does Not Lie: The Initiation of a Priest of Shango* (43 minutes)
  Slide show via (Voicethread)
  Music video for “Ase” by Richard Raw
Read: Marta Moreno Vega, *The Altar of My Soul*

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**Apply:** Post to discussion boards, respond to voice thread, complete Reading quiz,
**Due Date:** Feb. 25, 2019

**Unit Six: The Feminine Divine in African Spirituality (Week 8)**

**See:** Sacred Journeys: Osun-Osogbo (55 minutes)
Feminine Divine slide show via Voicethread
Beyonce Grammy Performance 2017

**Read:** Joan Dayan, “Erzulie: A Women’s History of Haiti”
Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”

**Apply:** Post to discussion boards, respond to Voicethread, submit Critical Reading Responses (2),
**Due Date:** March 4, 2019

**Unit Seven: African Folk practices in Jamaica: Obeah, Duppies, & Nine Night Rituals (Week 9–10)**

**Read:** Zora Neale Hurston, Tell My Horse chapters 1–5
Michelle Cliff, Abeng
Comparative analysis assignment instructions

**See:**

**Apply:** Post discussion, reading quiz, submit Comparative Analysis
**Due Date:** March 25, 2019

**Unit Eight: Louisiana Voodoo (Week 11–12)**

**See:** Beyonce, Lemonade Visual Album (58 minutes)
Excerpts from The Princess & the Frog and AHS: Coven
New Orleans Voodoo Tarot slide show via Voicethread

**Read:** Carolyn Morrow Long, Ch. 4, “Louisiana Voodoo”
Zora Neale Hurston, excerpt from Mules and Men
Final Project Assignment instructions

**Apply:** Post to discussion board, Post Flipgrid response, respond to Voicethread, complete reading quiz, submit final project abstract
**Due Date:** April 8, 2019

**Unit Nine: Conjure & Hoodoo in the American South (Week 13)**

**See:** Kara Walker, “Night Conjure” and “Keys to the Coop”
Romare Bearden, “Bayou Fever Series”

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Clips from Skeleton Key
Read: Romare Bearden, “Bayou Fever”
       Long, Ch. 3 “Conjure, Hoodoo, & Rootwork in the Protestant South”
       Chireau, “We All Believed in Hoodoo”
Apply: Post to discussion board, submit critical reading response (2)
Due Date: April 15, 2019

Final Unit: Final Projects and Presentation (Week 14–15)
Apply: Work on final project!
       Post multi-media project/presentation to the “Final Projects”
       discussion board -- create a separate thread for your project.
       Submit “What did I learn?” reflection post via Flipgrid
       Respond to your classmates’ projects on discussion board
Due Date: April 26, 2019

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