

University of Utah
Anthropology 3961-1: Religion in Latin America
Spring 2014
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:00 – 3:20
Alfred Emery 310

Instructor: Thomas Flamson
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Office: Stewart 213J
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30 – 1:30
Thursdays, 11:00 – 11:45 (*until 2/20*) / 11:00 – 12:00 (*after 2/20*)

SYLLABUS

Description: A comparative anthropological look at the complex religious traditions and changes of Latin America, including Amazonian shamanism, Pre-Columbian state religions, Folk Catholicism, Syncretism, and Evangelical movements. We will explore the social and historical dynamics of religiosity in Latin America, and the ways in which this diverse and complex region reflects important human universals in religious behavior and beliefs. In addition, the exploration of a variety of religious phenomena will provide a point of articulation to explore a variety of anthropological approaches to religion.

Content Warning: In this course we will discuss a wide variety of religious beliefs – including some you may subscribe to – from a perspective known as *methodological agnosticism*. We are not interested in determining whether or not a given belief is *true*, but rather in understanding how that belief works within its cultural context. Although students are encouraged to draw on their own experiences in discussing this material, including their own religious beliefs and practices, it will be important not to take offense at methodologically agnostic discussions of beliefs or practices they share.

In addition, some of the behaviors and beliefs we will discuss are of a sexual or violent nature. This will include issues of sexuality and sexual orientation, genital modification, sexual taboos, rape, and ritual sacrifice and mutilation. In particular, the first ethnography includes discussion of ritual mutilation in clinically graphic detail. Students likely to be offended by a frank (but not prurient) discussion of sexual or violent attitudes and practices in another culture should bear this in mind.

Texts: Neil Whitehead, *Dark Shamans: Kanaimà and the Poetics of Violent Death*, Duke University Press, 2002
Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*, Waveland Press, 2nd edition, 2014
Kristin Norget, *Days of Death, Days of Life: Ritual in the Popular Culture of Oaxaca*, Columbia University Press, 2006
Emma Cohen, *The Mind Possessed: The Cognition of Spirit Possession in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 2007
R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty*, Rutgers University Press, 1997

You are expected to have completed the readings listed for each week *prior* to the Tuesday session. Please check the weekly reading assignment in the syllabus carefully, and be sure to allow plenty of time to complete them, as there are usually about 100 pages assigned each week.

Although new copies of all 5 books may be expensive, most of them have been in print for several years, so you should have no difficulty acquiring used copies, if you prefer. The exception is Carrasco, who just came out with a new edition that we will be using; please be sure you get the 2nd Edition. Some are also available as e-books. Copies of the books will also be on reserve at the Marriott library, for 3-hour check-out. You will need your student ID to check them out.

Lectures: This course will be driven primarily by the reading and discussion of ethnographic case studies. We will discuss the theoretical perspectives the works draw on to explore religion as well as deepening our knowledge of religion in Latin America. The professor will be responsible for providing additional, contextual material to frame our discussion and to provide more depth. But it is important that students come to class prepared to participate in class discussion, having read the texts and thought about them deeply beforehand.

Grading:

Reading Presentations:	15%
Response Essays:	40%
Research Project:	25%
Final Exam:	20%

Reading Presentations: Several times throughout the semester, each student will be expected to provide a brief presentation (approximately 5 minutes) on one of the chapters from the readings. The point of these presentations is not to recap the entire chapter, but rather to highlight the key points the author is making, answer questions from other students, and present a broad discussion question to the class. These will be graded on a pass/fail basis. As the number of readings each student will be assigned will depend on enrollment, the exact details will be discussed in class. Student preferences will be weighed heavily in these assignments, but cannot always be guaranteed.

Response Essays: At the conclusion of each section, the professor will present a prompt for a brief essay assignment of 2-3 pages, due three days after the class meeting, and submitted on the course website. Each of these will be worth 10% of your course grade, and will be graded on a letter basis. Students who were responsible for a research project for a particular section (see below), will *not* have to complete the response essay.

Research Project: Each student will prepare a research project for one of the five sections. This project will consist of original research into a different example of the topic being discussed than the case study, comparing and contrasting both. Students will meet with the professor to discuss potential cases to research, and to avoid duplication with other students.

The project will consist of both a paper (6-8 pages long) and an oral presentation during the final class meeting of the section. The exact length and requirements of the presentation will depend in part on class enrollment, so the details will be discussed in class. Part of the presentation will include fielding questions from the class, and it is expected that this feedback will be incorporated into the paper, where appropriate. The paper will then be due three days after the section ends.

The paper (worth 20% of the course grade) will be graded on a letter basis; the presentation (worth 5% of the course grade) will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

Final Exam: There will be an open-book and open-note final exam during finals week, in the regular classroom. The exam will be comprehensive, and will consist of a series of essay questions related to material from throughout the course.

SCHEDULE
Subject to change

Week 1: Introduction to Religion in Latin America (1/7 & 1/9)

NO READINGS

I: SHAMANISM

Week 2: Anthropology and Alterity (1/14 & 1/16)

READINGS: *Dark Shamans*, Introduction, 1. The Ethnographer's Tale, and 2. Tales of the Kanaimà: Observers, pp. 1-87

Week 3: Magic, Ritual, and Warfare (1/21 & 1/23)

READINGS: *Dark Shamans*, 3. Tales of the Kanaimà: Participants, 4. Shamanic Warfare, and 5. Modernity, Development, and Kanaimà Violence, pp. 88-201

Week 4: Shamanism, Violence, and Human Nature (1/28)

READINGS: *Dark Shamans*, 6. Ritual Violence and Magical Death in Amazonia and Conclusion: Anthropologies of Violence, pp. 202-252

PRESENTATIONS on 1/30

RESPONSE ESSAY 1 due on 2/2

II: ECCLESIASTICISM

Week 5: Priests and the State (2/4 & 2/6)

READINGS: *Religions of Mesoamerica*, Preface & Chronology, 1. Introduction: Approaching Mesoamerican Religions, and 2. History and Cosmivision in Mesoamerican Religions, pp. 1-74

Week 6: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Religious Power (2/11 & 2/13)

READINGS: *Religions of Mesoamerica*, 3. The Religion of the Aztecs: Ways of the Warrior, Words of the Sage, 4. Maya Religion: Cosmic Trees, Sacred Kings, and the Underworld, and 5. Mesoamerica as a New Borderlands: Colonialism and Religious Creativity, pp. 75-187

PRESENTATIONS on 2/18

RESPONSE ESSAY 2 due on 2/21

III: CATHOLICISM

Week 7: World Religion in Latin America (2/20)

READINGS: *Days of Death*, Introduction: Death and Life in Oaxaca and 1. Anthropology in a Mexican City, pp. 1-69

Week 8: "Popular" Catholicism (2/25 & 2/27)

READINGS: *Days of Death*, 2. Practicing Popular Religion in Oaxaca, 3. Living with Death and 4. The Drama of Death, pp.70-183

Week 9: "Pop" Catholicism (3/4)

READINGS: *Days of Death*, 5. Days of the Dead in Oaxaca, 6. Spectacular Death and Cultural Change, and Epilogue: Life in Death, pp. 187-270

PRESENTATIONS on 3/6

RESPONSE ESSAY 3 due on 3/9

SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS on 3/11 & 3/13

IV: SYNCRETISM

Week 10: Slavery and Syncretism (3/18 & 3/20)

READINGS: *The Mind Possessed*, 1. Introducing Possession, 2. Historical and Ethnographic Setting, 3. The Research Community, 4. Describing, Interpreting, and Explaining Spirit Possession, and 5. Medicalist, Physiological, and Sociological Explanations, pp. 3-97

Week 11: Spirits and Possession (3/25 & 3/27)

READINGS: *The Mind Possessed*, 6. Spirits as Concepts, 7. Observing Possession, 8. The Social Relevance of Spirits, and Explaining Distributions of Spirit Concepts and Spirit Possession, pp. 99-204

PRESENTATIONS on 4/1

RESPONSE ESSAY 4 due on 4/4

V: EVANGELISM

Week 12: Proselytizing in Latin America (4/3)

READINGS: *Born Again in Brazil*, Introduction and 1. A Prophetic History, pp. 3-48

Week 13: Evangelism and Ethnomedicine (4/8 & 4/10)

READINGS: *Born Again in Brazil*, 2. The Preconversion World of Illness, 3. Conversion: Crisis, Cure, and Affiliation, 4. Health Maintenance: Spiritual Ecstasy and Mutual Aid, and 5. Health Maintenance through Ideology and Morality, pp. 51-125

Week 14: From Insurgents to Institution (4/15)

READINGS: *Born Again in Brazil*, 6. Authoritarian Assembly: Church Organization, 7. From the Assembly of Saints to the Legislative Assembly: Pentecostal Politics in Pará, and Conclusion, pp. 129-174

PRESENTATIONS on 4/17

RESPONSE ESSAY 5 due on 4/20

Week 15: Overview and Review (4/22)

NO READINGS

FINAL EXAM on Thursday, 4/24, 1:00 – 3:00 pm