

- Haitian won its Independence in 1804
- Readings for today closely tied to Haitian history
- (James) found that mass rape was used in Haiti as a method of fear
 - Rape and sexual abuse in Haiti and the justifications used by US reflect notion that Haitians practiced fetishism. It was believed that rape and sexual abuse were not as serious crimes, because “rape is a part of Haitian culture”
- Readings link ideas of government, culture, and questions of capacity for self-governance.
- Connecting political and cultural reasons in analyzing/justifying political actions, such as ethnic cleansing
- Situation in Haiti: Separation of classes, hypermilitarized atmosphere, political and social tension palpable
- Old stereotypes about ‘Africans’ and ‘Blacks’ prevalent, even in modern-day Haiti
 - Stereotypes are salient in the psyche – note story about pastor in Haiti
- Religious symbolism present in rhetoric that describes Haiti as a country ‘dedicated to Satan’
 - Trance description as a visceral encounter recalls encounters between early Europeans and Africans countries

Readings:

- **Fabian:** ‘culture shock’ experienced by Europeans in Africa
- Notion of ‘ecstasis’
- **Pietz:** what was produced out of encounters between Europeans and Africans.
 - There were two different systems of engagement between the two groups
 - Europeans shaped the trajectory of discourse about Africans
 - What were Western perceptions of objects?
 - What did being forced to interact produce in terms of market relations?
 - Deconstructs and repudiates term ‘fetish’
 - Karen McCarthy Brown redefines ‘fetish’ to be “a form of prayer” put into material form
 - NOT an example of false consciousness
 - Traditional definition of fetishism implies that Africans were without capacity for higher rationalization, exemplified by the ‘fact’ that they worshipped objects
 - This definition reflects Eurocentric notions regarding idol worship, ‘rationality’
 - Actually, African system of worship reflects different system of rationalization
 - Freud: fetishism represents sexual misplacement
 - Marx: fetishism can be equated with commodity fetishism, false consciousness

- Marx: economic production shifted from feudal modes (production of goods from land, pay a portion to lord) – direct connection between labor and the product of labor
 - New economic production: labor became mechanized/assembly line. Person is no longer directly involved in all aspects of production. No investment of person, decreased meaning to labor.
 - Value of labor is therefore alienated from laborer
 - Value can be divided into:
 - ‘use-value’
 - ‘exchange value’ when raw material is transformed into a finished product that is circulated on the market
 - When objects are traded for money, product value is abstracted into money value – leads the way for commodity fetishism
- It was thought that ‘Africans’ had capacity to go from concrete to abstract rationalizations of value. They were perceived to have a lack of ability to universalize or abstract
- Incapable of rational thought or abstracting to universal laws
- Conclusion was that they were incapable of living under autonomous rule of law
- Stereotype of Africans as chaotic, irrational thus served the economic and political interests of the Europeans
- Europeans were concerned for the mentality and capacity of governance of Africans

- Syncretism: usually in religious situations. Ex. Caribbean indigenous religious practices melded with Christian practices (usually by force).
 - Connection between indigenous practices – worshipping their own deities under the guise of Christian saints
- In the space of encounter, something new is created
- Attempt to understand the interactions between cultural spaces
- Concept of “making”: having labor involved in creating object imbues value, adds commodity value/exchange value.
- This process of blending, ‘making something new’ from distinct elements called creolization: blending, creating something new

- Stereotypes about French women were mapped to stereotyping of women in colonies
- Miscegenation: anxiety about identity for people with mixed heritage
- Freud: sexual displacement of idea of fetishism
- Hegel: “Africa is before history, not capable of abstract, rational thought, recording, analyzing history” – perceived Africans as incapable of universality, which was a major European criteria for ‘rationality’
 - Without this capacity, Europeans did not think that these cultures were as high (or advanced) as those with this capacity
- There is a connection and strong similarities between American attempts to restore order in Haiti to stereotypes about Africans in colonial times
- People who wrote about African culture were not fully aware of differences and had personal bias
- Main purpose of anthropology is ethnography

- Fetish has power, significance
 - Marcel Mauss: concept of mana -- NW Indians observing gift exchange. Some gifts are more imbued with power, capacity to effect change. As gifts accumulate, becomes abstracted form of power
 - Different from market system
 - Fetish is a fixed site of power
- Notion of fetish conflicts with Western notion of rational liberalism
- Characteristics of the fetish that are important:
 - Fetish is a material object with a particular value
- Fetishism conflicts with Western ideas of self, which emphasizes separation of mind and body
- Individual is seen as having power over themselves autonomously – cannot be affected by others, which idea of fetish in witchcraft conflicts with
- Fetish considered a form of idolatry, using rhetoric of magic, fear, and religious symbolism
- Foucault – individual rationalism. To have a democracy and rational government means that people should be capable of following rules of law

Link to Modern-Day Haiti:

- Mid 1700s – growing fear in colonial plantation system of poisoning by African slaves, who had knowledge of plants and herbs brought from Africa
- Using progression of analysis in historical contexts modern-day results can be understood
- Haiti was only Black colony to successfully overthrow colonial governance (and has been punished for it ever since)
- Discourse of lack of capacity for rational self-governance used to describe Haiti in political cultural contexts
 - Perceived that Haitians intensely followed single leaders, not rational principles – ‘proof’ that they did not have enough rational capacity to reason what is good for them
 - Widespread sexual terminology used to describe Haiti and Haitians, following from stereotypes about Africans

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21A.460J / WGS.620J Medicine, Religion and Politics in Africa and the African Diaspora
Spring 2005

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.