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Reclaiming the Truth

In Cabral's reading he discusses the struggles of the culture of liberation that comes with revolution. One of these struggles that is seeking liberation is certain peoples cultures and beliefs get twisted throughout a revolution. Many individuals try to reclaim their culture that was twisted into something that it is not. We see this with the practice of Vodun and how after the Haitian revolution it was painted in a negative light. However we did see the correct practice of Vodun before it was shifted and understood how performance is one big example of how things can shape a revolution by bringing people together or sharing a message. The paper relates to our class topic of Performance and Revolution because we see how the performance elements of Vodun were crucial for the Haitian captives to rise up against their oppressors. They relied on performance to get them through tough times and it gave them hope for a better future.

The practice of Vodou helped contribute to the Haitian revolution because it was a system of thought that helped center those Haitian slaves suffering under the law. Taking a look at the Moving Fictions article "The Roots of Haitian Vodou" Vodou was brought to Haiti by slaves being captured from the Dahomey Kingdom where the shared belief of "worshiping of the spirits of family ancestors." As more slaves began to migrate this shared practice continued to spread and evolve. Because the practice did not have a text that slave masters could review, it was a way

to have a peaceful mode of communication between the priests and the practitioners. Some of the white slave owners even baptized them as Catholic with the hopes of stopping the practice and instilling fear. Many religious figures were able to become political figures and have means of communication and mobilization to different people.

Vodou helped keep the Haitian slaves united and it was something that carried with them throughout the revolution. They received horrible treatment from the plantation owners and were never given any improved conditions. Since it was cheaper to import new slaves the owners decided it was a cheaper option than to improve the existing working conditions to save lives. Before the revolution occurred around 48,000 slaves in Haiti were able to escape and if they were not recaptured they were able to build communities away from the settled lands. As the Haitian slaves were preparing attacks and strategies for attacks during the revolution they would congregate together to practice their religion as a way to show unity. With many white individuals noticing this frequent gathering and then began to feel the tension as to something is going to happen. It is reported that the Dutty Boukman gave the signal to begin to revolt who was also a vodou priest. Boukman would hold ceremonies at Bois Caiman where there was an ongoing meeting where the slave revolt was being organized. During these ceremonies there was an animal sacrifice, an oath, and a speech that solidified why everyone would come together. After the noted last meeting and Boukman signaled the revolution it was reported that 1800 plantations were destroyed and 1000 slaveholders killed. The Vodou religion was a big part in the Haitian revolution serving as an outlet for the Haitian slaves to be at peace with themselves and strategically plan. However the practice has been stigmatized in negative connotation and it is still present today.

Looking at the world today we still see how this revolutionary culture of Vodun is still seeking liberation from its image that it is framed. Examining the Pluralism Project article titled “Vodou, Serving the Spirits,” it discusses how many of those who practice it are all throughout the US. To provide a clear example the article mentions that there over 450,000 individuals who practice it in New York City alone. However it states how we can not really tell the magnitude of the practitioners because it has been very villainized in pop culture. From movies, TV Shows, haunted attractions and merchandise there has now been a brand assembled picturing this practice in a dark light.

For example big networks like Disney have been known to villainize this practice by showing it to young kids in movies. In the movie “The Princess and The Frog” the main villain is named Dr. Facilier who is the main reason that the characters are frogs because he is using them for his own personal gain. Whenever there are scenes with this character and he is practicing loa the scenes are really dark and tense. Just from the downbeat of the background music you already know that things are taking a turn for the worst. There are instances where images of skulls, dark figures, and other taunting imagery come to life to scare the main characters. These images can be scary for a young audience and makes them have a bad idea of what the practice actually is. I personally remember getting a bit scared because Disney dramatized a practice that does not center around dark practices. Even the character Dr. Facilier has many awful characteristics that give the impression that those who practice this religion are evil. Facilier manipulates individuals using his charm, polite, and smooth-talking nature to get them to visit his lair. He displays that his reasoning for his practices are spawned from greed, control, power, and having authority over others. Much of his character relies on hurting others in means

of reaching his personal goals. Facilier even demonstrates how unapologetic he is when it comes to killing since it is a way to offer a life in change for his powers. Looking at just this one example it shows how kids are being shown images that shape their view about what the ancient practice is all about.

There are many different examples that reinforce these false beliefs especially when the Fall season rolls around. Theme parks such as Knotts Scary Farm have mazes that take the practice of vodou and use it to scare guests. When the maze was running during the season the park advertised an experience where “mindless zombies trudge through the murky bogs in search of bloody sacrifices and demons use Voodoo curses to possess innocent souls.” They design the maze with actors in elaborate makeup, makeshift altars, blast music and other effects that villinize the practice in today's age. Circling back to the article it mentions how because of all the false images that have been categorized as Vodun, it has been a struggle to reform its image to its pure form in the US. Many ceremonies that “might have taken place in semi-public sanctuaries in Haiti” are now typically being held in basements to help provide privacy. However some practitioners have sought culture liberation by renting out public spaces to perform their ceremonies. There even have been priests that have taken initiative to teach younger kids in the US to be “godchildren” new in the religion.

Vodou is still seeking liberation from its negative image that it was given after the Haitian Revolution. This performance liberation relates to what we learned in class this semester because it discusses how performance can shape a revolution and also be altered by it. The practice of Vodou gave comfort to people reassuring them that everything will be okay. It can relate to this past unit of the Venezuelan revolution because the performance of music, like from Ali Primera,

reassured people to stand for what is right and rise up against their oppressors. Then with the French Revolution we saw how some performance gave individuals a voice in speaking out against the inequality with the rich. Performance is such a powerful way to spread a message and we can still see its effects today.



Photo taken from [The Voodoo Music + Arts Experience](#). A music festival in New Orleans, LA, that consists of many white concert goers dressing up in costumes that culturally appropriate Vodou and Mexican culture, among others. An example of how this practice is still being stereotyped today.