

Supernat.04
Fall 2004

Anthropology 424: The Supernatural in the Modern World

Instructor: Dr. Magliocco

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Office hours: T 2:00 – 5:00; Th 2:00 – 4:00 and by appointment

I. Objectives

The “supernatural” is a category of beliefs, phenomena and experiences unique to Western cultures which developed as a result of Enlightenment discourses separating notions of the rational from the irrational. Yet despite stigmatization by church and state structures in the West, a number of folk cultures continue to believe and participate in practices related to the supernatural. In this course, we will explore why and how this happened. We will examine supernatural and occult traditions as they appear in the context of religion, narrative, folk healing, folk drama, ritual and media accounts and presentations. We will also study how scholars from various disciplines have approached these topics.

This course does not attempt to prove or disprove the existence of supernatural phenomena. Rather, it takes an ethnographic, phenomenological approach to this issue, focusing on people’s lived experience and their attempts to make sense of it. Students will be encouraged to explore the relationship between scientific belief and supernatural belief in the context of the contemporary post-modern landscape. This course may help students make sense of the overwhelming popularity of supernatural legends, fads and groups connected with the campus experience and the contemporary world in general.

II. Form and Requirements

This course combines lecture presentations and films with participatory activities and class discussions. Student attendance and participation are crucial to the success of this course. Attendance entails not missing more than 2 class meetings, notifying the instructor in cases of prolonged absence, arriving on time and staying for the duration of the class. *Leaving during the break will count as an absence!* Students are expected to come to class prepared, e.g. having read the day’s assignment and taken notes on it. Participation means actively contributing to classroom and online discussions with questions and comments, and a clear, well-thought-out and well-presented class presentation. This course requires a substantial amount of reading and writing. If you are not able or willing to meet these expectations, you should drop the class.

No cell phones or pagers are permitted in this class. If you have such devices, please turn them off while you are in class.

Required readings: The following texts are required reading for this course and are available for purchase at the Matador Bookstore and on reserve in Oviatt Library:

Barbara Walker, ed. *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*

Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*

Karen Brown, *Mama Lola*

Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neopaganism in America*

Readings for Anthro 424 available online in downloadable form at:

<http://www.csun.edu/anthropology.ant424.htm>

You are responsible for doing the assigned readings on a weekly basis. Material from the readings will appear on the tests, and is a valuable source of bibliography for final papers. While copies of all required books will be placed on reserve, you are encouraged to purchase them. Keep in mind that there may be many students trying to get hold of reserve readings, especially around exams, and you may not get a chance to read them unless you own them.

Exams: There will be two tests, both in essay and short-answer format. Each will be worth 25% of the final grade. If you must miss a test due to illness, you need to notify me before class on the day of the test. When you return to class, we can schedule a make-up. **No notification, no make-up -- no exceptions!**

Final paper/ project: Each student will complete a final paper or project on a topic relating to the course, using theories and principles discussed in the course to analyze material. Projects may be based on fieldwork in the community, material from the Folklore Archives on campus, library research, or a combination of these. Creative projects (films, videos, exhibits, multi-media presentations, group projects) may also be accepted, with the instructor's prior consent. On the last day of class, students will present a brief summary of their research to the class. The paper/ project is worth 40% of the final grade. More information will be available in a separate handout.

IV. Evaluation Breakdown:

Class participation and attendance.....	10%
Midterm.....	25%
Final.....	25%
Final paper/project.....	40%

V. Grading Scale

93 - 100 = A	83-88 = B	73-77 = C	63-67 = D
90-92 = A-	80-82 = B-	70-72 = C-	60-62 = D-
88-89 = B+	78-79 = C+	68-69 = D+	59 and below = F

III. Week-by-Week Syllabus

Day	Topic	Readings
Part I: The Anthropology of "Supernatural" Experience		
8/26	Definitions, Issues, Concepts Science and the "supernatural;" the Phenomenological Approach	Walker, ch. 1; Motz, in reader
9/2	The Interconnected Universe; Magic, Astrology and Divination Film: <i>Wondrous Events</i>	Walker, chs. 2, 3, 7, 10
9/9	Library Instruction! Meet in Oviatt Library Lab C at 4:00	Start reading for next week!
9/16	The Return of the Dead: Ghosts, Hauntings and Spirit	Ellis, Mc Clenon, in reader
9/23	Super-Natural: Fairies, Space Aliens, Bigfoot and Abduction Experiences	Bullard, Jacobs, Rojcewicz, Milligan, Eberly, Munro, in reader
Paper proposals due!		
Part II: Alternate Ways of Knowing and Religious Experience		
9/30	The Afro-Caribbean Religious Experience: Vodou	K. Brown, chs. 1-6
10/7	Trance, Possession and Trans-Personal Experience in Vodou Film: <i>Divine Horsemen</i>	K. Brown, chs. 7-12
10/14	Midterm Exam!	
10/21	Possessed by the Holy Ghost: Pentecostal Religions Film: <i>The Holy Ghost People</i>	Covington, chs. 1-6
10/28	The Search for the Numinous in Modern Religious Experience Paper Outlines Due!	Covington, chs. 7-11; Stephen, in reader

Part III: Reclamation, Oppositionality and Projection

11/4	Re-enchanting the World: Contemporary Paganism	Magliocco, Intro + Chaps. 1-2
11/11	More on Neo-Paganism, Religion and Identity	Magliocco, Chaps. 3-7
11/18	The Devil in Our Midst: The Modern Satanic Scares	Victor, Ellis, Moody, in reader
11/25	No class; Thanksgiving!	
12/2	Final projects due; class project presentations!	
12/9	Final Exam, 5:30 - 7:30 PM!	