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
  o 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.
  o Value of labor is therefore alienated from laborer
  o 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

  o 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’
  o 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
  o 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
  o Different from market system
  o Fetish is a fixed site of power

Notion of fetish conflicts with Western notion of rational liberalism

Characteristics of the fetish that are important:
  o 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
    o 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
    o Widespread sexual terminology used to describe Haiti and Haitians, following from stereotypes about Africans