Tuesday, February 26
12:30 PM - 1:30PM
2339 Faculty/Administration Building
Free and Open to the Public

Haitian Vodou and Cuban Santería: Acculturation of Catholic Saints in African Religions

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The African slaves may have been stripped naked and forked on the European trade ships for the Americas, but their minds were covered with their indigenous cultures, especially their myths and rituals. Some scholars, traditionally, pretend that the slaves have used the Catholic saints to hide or cover the African spirits like Vodun of the Adja in Haiti and Orisha of the Yoruba in Cuba to mystify their masters in the practice of their religions. Other scholars have talked about a voluntary act of the slaves, in their struggle for freedom, to embody their resistance in the very body of these saints worshipped by the slaveholders in their Catholic churches. In both case, the oppressed would have appropriated voluntarily the oppressors' sacred icons for socio-cultural and political goals. This lecture intends to discuss the failure of both explanations in regard to the symbolic nature of culture. Illustrations from Haitian and Cuban material cultures will support the argumentation. The lecture will also address the use of “syncretism” to explain the cultural presence of the Catholic saints in the Vodun and Santería temples in Haiti and Cuba.

Guérin C. Montilus is a cultural anthropologist who focuses his research upon African cultures and the anthropology of religion. Dr. Montilus came to Wayne State University in the fall of 1975 and has taught the ‘History of Anthropological Theory and Method’ and ‘Magic, Religion, and Science.’ His teaching interests include social and symbolic anthropology, the history of anthropology, theory in anthropology, the anthropology of religion, and African cultures and civilizations. One of his major publications include Dieux en Diaspora (1988), Dompim: The Spirituality of African Peoples (1989) and numerous articles on related topics.