

Binghamton University

COLI 535H/ COLI 480O/ ENGL 593H/ ENGL 450J/ LACAS 580A
spring 09 M 1:10-4:10 p.m. LT 1506

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Primitivism and the Americas

Although we know well that the arts of Africa provided a crucial stimulus for European Modernism, we still have much to learn about the importance of primitivism for avant-garde projects in other parts of the world. In the Americas, innovative writers and artists need to work through new questions and paradoxes, and some thorny difficulties as well, if they are to pursue an interest in primitive art. What shifts in strategy take place when writers cannot treat the “Primitive” as exotic, and instead must accept it as a strong presence in everyday culture? How does the context of the racialized societies of the Americas inflect avant-gardiste Primitivism?

We will begin by reading theoretical texts central to discussions of Primitivism and will later focus on works from the United States, Brazil, and Cuba, three countries distinguished by both their artistic vitality and the presence of the cultures of the African diaspora. We will take the representation of popular music by early 20th century writers as the guiding thread for our substantive discussions. This course will be of interest to students whose work focuses on Latin America, the literature of the Americas or, more broadly, in the problems of post-colonial literature.

Requirements:

Attendance and class participation	10%
Individual conference	10%
Oral presentation	30%
preliminary version of the term paper, to be presented at a workshop at the end of the semester	
Term paper	50%
due 12/14, Monday, by 4:30 p.m. in my mailbox in LT 1503 (10-15 pages)	

Texts:

Freud, Totem and Taboo

Franz Boas, The Mind of Primitive Man

Alain Locke, The New Negro

Fernando Ortiz, Cuban Counterpoint

Alejo Carpentier, Music in Cuba; Lost Steps

Mario de Andrade, Macunaíma (available on reserve)

Reserves: Book chapters and articles will be available on electronic reserves and the texts will be put on reserve.

Schedule

- WEEK 1 Aug 31- Opening
- WEEK 2 Sept 7 – No Class -Labor Day
- WEEK 3 Sept 14 – Totem and Taboo, especially essay III: “Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thought”
- WEEK 4 Sept 21- Boas, The Mind of Primitive Man, to p. 144.
 New Yorker article on Franz Boas
- WEEK 5 Sept 28 – No Class - Yom Kippur
- WEEK 6 Oct 5- Boas, The Mind of Primitive Man 145 to end
 Todorov, “Race”
- WEEK 7 Oct 12 – New Negro, pp. 3-53; 199-257; 231-256
- WEEK 8 Oct 19 – New Negro, 353-314
 F. Scott Fitzgerald, “May Day”
- WEEK 9 Oct 26 - Fernando Ortiz, Cuban Counterpoint, 3-93; 97-103; 183-253
- WEEK 10 Nov 2 - Alejo Carpentier, preface to The Kingdom of this World

