

**Sabbatical Leave Report**  
Santería Across the Curricula  
Project for Fall 2020  
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This report summarizes the sabbatical project I completed during the Fall 2020 semester.

### Background of Sabbatical Project

The purpose of my proposed sabbatical is to develop an educational bridge to students seeking cultural knowledge while reflecting on the cultural impact and practices within the Latino and Anglo-Saxon communities in the United States. I intend to link this project to courses offered by the Sociology, Political Science, Philosophy and Criminal Justice departments thus creating a sense of respect, tolerance, knowledge acquisition and acceptance, by shattering images previously established through a lack of comprehension of its content.

The outcome of this sabbatical is comprised of research and its conclusions in the four areas noted below:

- Socio-economic impact (Anthropology and culture)
- Political implications (Criminal Justice / the law)
- Religious ramifications (Philosophy and religion)
- Urban growth in United States (Sociology)

First, I would like to present a brief introduction of Santería and its evolution to the United States.



1500's



1500's to 1800's



1959 to present

Santería developed among African slaved communities upon their arrival to Cuba in the 1500's as a result of the Atlantic Slave Trade taking place between the 16th and 19th centuries. It came to fruition through the blending of the traditional religions brought to Cuba by enslaved West Africans and Roman Catholicism; the only religion legally permitted on the island by the Spanish colonial government. In late 1959 and the early 1960s, and due to the Cuban diaspora following Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution, Santería arrived in the United States. However, "Santería is not documented (Clark, 2007), since the faith does not have registries, holy books or doctrinal teachings preserved in writing (Lefever, 1996). The expansion of the religion itself is passed verbally, from generation to generation and is carried in the memories of the practitioners. Finally, Santería followers venerate the Catholic saints and cling to certain teachings of the Christian church (Lefever, 1996).

These beliefs cause many Santería followers to identify themselves as Catholic when questioned about affiliation (“Freedom report, Cuba,” 2012”). In fact, the American government has been unable to determine an estimate on the prevalence of Santeria faithful not only in Cuba but within the United States (“Freedom report, Cuba,” 2012).

Santería has existed in the United States prior to 1959 with just a handful of followers (Lefever, 1996). The early immigrants to the United States were mostly white and more likely Catholics (Lefever, 1996). It was not until the Mariel boatlift of 1980 occurred that a functioning group of Santería followers were able to establish themselves in the United States (Lefever, 1996). As stated by López-Sierra in 2012, the immigrants arriving in the United States as a result of the Mariel boatlift of 1980 have been characterized, racially and economically, as lower-class Afro-Cubans or mestizos. These people, unlike the first wave of immigrants between 1959 and 1979, were not practicing Catholics but brought with them the basis of today's, American Santería practices (Lefever, 1996). It is from this point, that Santería has now gone “mainstream” in the United States, suspending its secrecy and in the process of winning recognition and legitimacy as a religion by the United States Supreme Court. It is imperative to recognize that Santería is a product of faith, social manipulation, and racial discord.

The growth of Santería in the United States has also seen its impact in the application of laws as clearly seen in the practice of the first amendment as reflected in the summary of a First Amendment Landmark Supreme Court case of “Church of the Lukumi-Babalu Aye v. Hialeah”. This case arose when the City of Hialeah (Florida) announced the building of a facility that included a house of worship, a school, a cultural center, and a museum. This situation was very distressing to the community because the element of animal sacrifice was very prevalent to the practice of Santería. The ultimate outcome in the U. S. Supreme Court stipulated that the purpose of the “local laws” (City of Hialeah) was to suppress the Santería religion based on their animal sacrifice practices. In summarizing, the high court cited that the practice of animal sacrifice was deemed legal within the confines of an individual's home or dwelling. The Court emphasized that the City (Hialeah) had failed to establish that their interest was compelling because the ordinances only restricted conduct by the Church and the Santeria religion, and no other similar conduct that created the same type of harm. In essence, the laws did not prohibit the private slaughter of animals for food or kosher butchering. As can be seen from this ruling, this win for Santería also shows an added win in the cultural, philosophical, and anthropological aspect of the religion.

Santeria's traditional function is to provide an anchor to culture and sociological identity. The social work profession is committed to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and oppressed members of society, which is particularly important to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and oppressed members of society. Social work has acknowledged the importance of spirituality (E.D. Smith, 1998). This is most visible in end of life and palliative care where the profession explores the significance of religion and spirituality as a means of relieving psychological distress. (E.D. Smith, 1998).

According to some data I collected from different publications, most American Santería followers (approximately 300,000) are in New York City with a much smaller number (approximately 70,000) living in south Florida (Lefever, 1996). Other cities where Santería is practiced include Los Angeles, Chicago, New Orleans, and Philadelphia. It is important to assert that Santería is a product of faith, social manipulation, and racial discord, (cultural, religious aspect sociological aspects). The attitude in this area is to create a structure of public relations that provided an educative curriculum to expand on its growth. In spite of its cultural growth, the main goal is to benefit humanity at large. Morales makes it clear to us that this discord is not over, it has simply gone underground (Morales, 2013). As a result, Hearn anticipates an official break between the Catholic Church and Santería (Hearn, 2008), while Clark envisions the growth of Santeria as a strong worldwide religion (Clark, 2007). As it can be traced from its beginning in the New World in the 1500's, the outcome of its future, political, religious and anthropological growth, will evolve, and the faith will adapt to a changing world, and it will be reflected in the continued expansion of its practice.

“The study of Santería in federal prisons provides us with an understanding of the religion. According to a study in this area, 5,000 Cuban nationals are incarcerated in prisons and jails throughout the United States. Yet correctional staff who work with these Cubans often find themselves in the position of the two correctional officers: They do not know much about this complex form of worship. The finding within the article “Santería in Federal Prisons, Understanding a little-known religion, Mark S. Hamm, 1992” indicate that the four primary aspects of Santería reported on in this article deal with divination, sacrifice, spiritual mediumship, and initiation. Within the divination aspect, those incarcerated were seeking to survive oppressive circumstances; they felt that their devotion to the “orishas” (saints) could get them out of prison and back to resettling in America. The sacrifice aspect was more difficult to create since they lacked the materials needed and only found in the outside world. Thus, they built altars with discarded cereal boxes or books, and were usually covered with a white piece of cloth or a white tee shirt. The altars were always placed nearest the doorway to the windowsill of the cell. Interestingly enough, Catholic icon images were placed on the glass of the windows just as their ancestors (African slaves) had done in the 1500’s and 1600’s to transition from their African roots to the Christian faith encountered during that period of history in order to survive. Within those prison altars, makeshift candles, apples, oranges, coffee, and cigars were presented as offering to the “orishas”. To satisfy the requirement for spiritual mediumship, some forms of rock candy were present in the altars to signify the “Stones of the Saints. (in the religion, each saint has a difference preference for different stones/types of candy)”. With regards to the initiation aspect, the article found that none of the devotees had advanced to receive a special orisha due to the limitation aspects of this area (being unable to participate in the initiation process.

Outlined below you will find pictures of altars common to Santería in the outside world as well as a video of a common initiation ritual for acceptance into the religion\*\*



\*\* Notice the presence of both African orishas and Catholic images within the altars.

Video of Santería initiation ritual:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-dhgpY64Mo>

Video of Botanica—Soul Food and Animal Sacrifices in Santería:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Np0YD3Ax\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Np0YD3Ax_k)

In the following page you will find some of the most important “orishas” and their Catholic counterparts.





Babalu Aye  
God of the Earth



St. Lazarus



Yemaya  
Goddess of Water and Strength



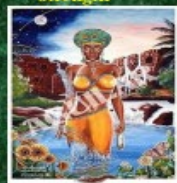
Virgin of Regla



Changó  
Goddess of Beauty,  
Passion and Power



Santa Barbara



Oshún, Goddess of Love  
and Sensuality



Our Lady of  
Charity

## ORISHAS—PART I



Eleguá  
God of Roads  
and Paths



St. Anthony of Padua



Osún Goddess  
of Rivers, Purity,  
and Sensuality



St. John the Baptist



Obatalá  
God of the Sky



Our Lady of Mercy

## ORISHAS—PART II

This now concludes my sabbatical project. My goal is to become a guest speaker in the different areas of academia highlighted in this report and present, comment, and answer questions the students may have on Santería as it relates to their different areas of study. This will allow me to approach the students and educate them in an area where many misconceptions exist, and further expand their growth, openness and understanding. I thank the Board of Trustees for approving my sabbatical and making it possible for me to pursue this project. This has been a great opportunity to engage and research a topic that has greatly impacted my growth as an educator.

### Bibliography

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-dhgpY64Mo>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Np0YD3Ax\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Np0YD3Ax_k)