

Anthropology 1130
Readings Questions for Wade Davis's *The Serpent and the Rainbow*

Chapter 1: The Jaguar

1. What happened to Davis in the central American jungle?
2. What is the significance of the jaguar?
3. What is ethnobotany?

Chapter 2: 'The Frontier of Death'

1. What project has Davis been asked to participate in? Who asked him? Why are they interested?
2. How do the scientists depicted in this chapter define death? How do they say you can confirm that death has occurred?
3. What is a zombi? How is it relevant to the larger research 'project'?

Chapter 3: 'The Calabar Hypothesis'

1. What is the Calabar Hypothesis? What is its relationship to Vodou?
2. What research methods does Davis employ to determine the poisons involved in Vodou? (Should we think of these drugs as poisons in the context of Vodou?)
3. What cross-cultural evidence does Davis point to for the use of drugs in religious ceremonies?
4. How do the Efik use the calabar bean?

Chapter 4: 'White Darkness and the Living Dead'

1. Make note of the Haitian Creole (language) terms and their meaning in the chapter. (Terms like bokor, hounfour, hounsis, mambo)
2. Describe the dance of the initiates. How do they become possessed? What are they able to do when they are possessed?
3. What does Davis mean when he says that zombification is a 'social process'?

Chapter 5: 'A Lesson in History'

1. What are the key events in Haitian history?
2. What is the role of the houngan in Vodou?
3. What happened to Clairvius Narcisse? How is his experience explained?
4. How do Haitian beliefs about the creation of zombis differ from Davis's beliefs?

Chapter 6: 'Everything is History, Nothing is History'

1. How does Davis get the proper poison?
2. What do you make of the ethics of his actions?
3. What goes into Zombi Poison?
4. What kind of a religious specialist is Marcel?
5. What do Voudounists consider to be poison? Is there an antidote to Zombi Poison?

Chapter 7: 'Columns on a Blackboard'

1. What laboratory processes are involved in verifying the poison?
2. How does the behavior of American scientists differ from Vodou priests where the poison is concerned?
3. What are the symptoms of tetrodotoxin poisoning and how are they related to the experiences of Clairvius Narcisse?
4. What is the secret to using tetrodotoxin?
5. Despite discovering the formula for the poison, Davis admits he missed the point about zombis. What is the point?

Chapter 8: 'Voodoo Death'

1. Why do people from the Victorian era fear death? What did they do about that fear?
2. What are the different ways that anthropologists have explained (rationalized?) voodoo death?
3. What is the role of the Bokor in voodoo death?

Chapter 9: 'In Summer the Pilgrim's Walk'

1. What is missing from Davis's understanding of zombification?
2. What precautions are taken when using the Zombi Poison?
3. What are the two kinds of zombis?

Chapter 10: 'The Serpent and the Rainbow'

1. What are the serpent and the rainbow?
2. How do Vodou believers explain or understand good health?
3. What is the relationship between zombis and Vodou? Why create zombis?

Chapter 11: 'Tell My Horse'

1. How is the Haitian slave revolt connected to Vodou?
2. Who was Zora Neale Hurston? What did she do?
3. What are the secret societies Davis and Hurston talk about? How are they related to Vodou? What is their role in Haitian society?
4. How is zombification understood in the cities? In the countryside?

Chapter 12: 'Dancing in the Lion's Jaw'

1. What do you make of the ethics of trying to infiltrate a Haitian secret society? Is this the kind of thing anthropologists should be doing?
2. What rituals are evident during the meeting of the secret society?

Chapter 13: 'Sweet as Honey, Bitter as Bile'

1. What goes on at secret society meetings?
2. How might one get 'sold' to a secret society? (What really happened to Narcisse?)
3. What do you make of Davis's actions at the end of the book?

Epilogue

1. How is zombification 'consistent with the heritage of the people'?