Festivals of the Black Atlantic World: A Work in Progress
(Preliminary Syllabus subject to Change)

This course proposes to examine festivals from the Black Atlantic World, that is, from cultures along the western coast of Africa and in the Western Hemisphere where people of African descent have lived since the 16th and 17th centuries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, festivals were the theatres and museums of their communities, and served simultaneously as the most sacred and most entertaining times of the year. The course will consider “traditional” festivals in Africa (and the arts they encompass), festivals as they have morphed into 21st century events aimed at least in part at developing a tourist audience, New World festivals glossed by the term Carnaval that draw on African traditions, and 20th and 21st century African art festivals like Festac 77, Dak’Art, and South Africa’s biennale that celebrate contemporary arts.

JEAN M. BORGATTI
jborgatti@gmail.com
(www.clarku.edu/~jborgatt)
Tues – Thursday 4:30 – 5:45

Required Texts:
Selected readings either placed on reserve or posted on the Wiki.

Office hours will be from 3-4 and 6-7 on Tuesdays and Thursdays or by appointment. Email is how I will communicate with you. I will expect written work from you by email. You will get a response from me if it has been received. If you do not get a response, send me another email.
Course Requirements:
--Attendance at Cambridge Caribbean Festival – Sept. 10, the South Boston Street Festival Sept. 18, or the Berklee Jazz Festival Block Party Sept. 24. The Cambridge festival is the most pertinent, but if this is impossible, the others will provide interesting comparative fodder for discussion. 10%
--Class Participation and Participation on class Wiki as indicated 10% (This implies attendance in class).
--Reflection paper on the festival attended -- (in two parts) -- the first an immediate response due on the class date (5%) following the festival and a more considered response due later in the semester incorporating selected readings from the syllabus and additional resources. (10%) – total 15%
--Black Atlantic World article written summary 5%
--Research Paper and Powerpoint Presentation on a work of art from the Black Atlantic World that can be contextualized within a festival context, or considered in a comparison of its old world/new world. manifestation and context. A list of topics will be suggested. (See below for details). 40% total – topic selection (5%), annotated bibliography (5%), paper text (15%), final version with suggested revisions as appropriate (5%), powerpoint (draft 5%) and final presented in class (5%). This is subject to revision depending upon the class.
--A final consisting of a brief slide check (in exam period) to make sure you have acquired a visual vocabulary relevant to this class and future studies of Black Atlantic Visual Culture. Images and discussion context will be posted on the Wiki a week before the exam. Questions will be drawn from the posted images. 10%
--A final short paper (no more than three pages) considering the readings in which you will evaluate them for their specific utility in relation to the course content. 10%

Sept. 6-8: syllabus, people, and topics
Film: Mas: Trinidadian Carnivals
Reading:
--Robert Farris Thompson: Recapturing Heaven’s Glamour: Afro-Caribbean Festivalizing Arts (N&B, pp.17-29)
--Bettelheim, Nunley & Bridges: Caribbean Festival Arts: An Introduction (N&B, Ch. 1: pp. 31-38)
--Nunley, Masquerade Mix Up and Festival Diffusion (N&B, Ch. 3 & 6: pp. 85-118, 165-182)
Saturday: Sept. 10 – Cambridge Caribbean Festival (I will cancel a class later in the semester to make up for your participation in a festival)
Massachusetts Avenue will be closed on the North side from 12:30-4pm for the parade.
Parade Route: The parade route has been expanded and will span 1.5 miles and passes through Cambridgeport, Central Square, and Kendall Square. It starts at Blackstone Street and River Street, continues up River Street, and onto Massachusetts Avenue in Central Square. From Central Square, it continues down Massachusetts Avenue to Main Street into Kendall Square. Public Transportation: The event can be accessed by public transportation via the MBTA red line. The parade starts near the Central Square T-stop on the Red Line. Take the MBTA stop to Kendall Square for the festival site.
(SUGGESTED GRADUATE STUDENT(S) TOPIC – TO DOCUMENT THE FESTIVAL AND RESEARCH IT, INTERVIEWING PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANIZERS AFTER THE EVENT)

13-15: What is the Black Atlantic/ History and Theory of Diaspora
Reading: Required for all: Robert Farris Thompson, Introduction, Flash of the Spirit, pp. xiii-xvii.
All: Select another article from those below to read. You will be asked to summarize it during class discussion. If all articles have not been chosen, some will be re-assigned so clear your article with me by email—and allow yourself three options.
--Kristin Mann, Shifting Paradigms in the Study of the African Diaspora and of Atlantic History and Culture, in Rethinking the African Diaspora (Mann & Bay (eds.) 2001.
--Paul Lovejoy: Transatlantic Transformations: The Origins and Identities of Africans in the Americas, in Africa, Brazil, and the Construction of Trans-Atlantic Black Identities, 2008, pp.81-112
Film: Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness or Amistad
Webs of communication as manifest in visual culture
Sept. 27-29/Oct. 4 Yoruba culture and its implications for the Black Atlantic world

Reading: Thompson, Chapter 1, pp.3-99

Oct. 4-6 Kongo Culture and its implications for the Black Atlantic World, especially Cuba and Brazil
Reading: Thompson, Chapter 2, pp.103-159
Bettelheim (N&B, Chapter 5) pp.137-145—Cuban festivals

Oct. 11-13 Vodoun in Haiti -- an amalgam of Yoruba, Fon, and Kongo elements
Reading: Thompson, Chapter 3, pp159-191
Yonker (N&B, Chapter 5) pp.146-155--Haitian Festivals
Film: Maya Deren’s Divine Horsemen of Haiti to be discussed in the context of the reading

Oct. 18-20 Carnaval(s) – Mirror of ‘diaspora’
Bettelheim (N&B, Chapter 2), pp. 39-84—Jonkonnu
Bettelheim and Nunley (N&B, Chapter 4), pp.119-135—Hosay
Bridges (N&B, Chapter 5), pp.156-163--New Orleans
Film: All on a Mardi Gras Day

Oct. 25-27 Case Study: Okpella’s Olimi Festival as Art Event
Reading: Jean Borgatti, Okpella Masquerades, African Arts, 1976 (posted on wiki).

Nov.1 Case Study: Akan Art and Politics
Film clip from A Great Tree Has Fallen

Nov.3 Heritage Festivals
Osun in Osogbo
Reading: Probst, Ch. 5 (Graduate Students: Chapter 7)
Dogon Dama
Reading: Hoffman “Portable Paradise” in Nooter (Secrecy), pp.223-233
(Graduate Students: Paul Lane, Tourism and Social Change among the Dogon, African
Carnaval in Guinea Bissau
Doran Ross, Carnaval Masquerades in Guinea Bissau, African Arts, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Jul., 1993), pp. 64-71+88

Nov. 8 – No class (Friday Schedule)

November 10: Calabar Festival (Amanda Carlson)
Reading: to be assigned

November 15--Recalling the Future: Art in Contemporary Africa (Dak’Art Biennale) -- Film

November 17 – class cancelled (re: Festival ‘comp’ time)

Nov. 22 Festac ’77 and the Queen Idia Mask

Nov. 24 Thanksgiving

Nov. 29 South African Arts Biennales & Discussion of Arts Festivals in general
Reading: Carol Becker: The Second Johannesburg Biennale, Art Journal, Summer 1998 (posted on wiki)

Dec. 1 Class Presentations & Discussion

Dec/6-8 Class presentations & Discussion

Other useful reading/resources:
http://www.liv.ac.uk/csis/blackatlantic (website)
http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/african_innovations/ (new installation of African works along an historical timeline)
http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/loango/ltusk.htm (Spiral of History)
http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/move/index.html (African Artists on the Move)
http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/dialogue/intro.htm (Transatlantic Dialogue)

For Yoruba Culture:
Babatunde Lawal: Embodying the Sacred in Yoruba Art: Featuring the Bernard and Patricia Wagner Collection,

For Kongo Culture:
Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet: The four moments of the sun: Kongo art in two worlds (1981)
For Afro-Brazil:Mikelle Smith Omari, From the Inside to the Outside: The Art and Ritual of Bahian Candomble, Museum of Cultural History UCLA Monograph #24 1984

For Haiti: Donald J. Cosentino (Editor), Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou (1995)
For Festivals and Performance:
Margaret Thompson Drewal: Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,1992)