

Today of spirits,
called loa. the word
means



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Today over 60 million people practice Vodun worldwide. Religious similar to Vodun can be found in South America where they are called Umbanda, Quimbanda or Candomble. It is widely practiced in Benin, where it is the official religion. Vodun (a. k.

a. Vodoun, Voudou, Voodoo, Sevi Lwa) is commonly called Voodoo by the public. The name is traceable to an African word for “ spirit”. Vodun’s roots go back to the West African Yoruba people who lived in 18th and 19th century Dahomey. That country occupied parts of today’s Togo, Benin and Nigeria. Slaves brought their religion with them when they were forcibly shipped to Haiti and other islands in the West Indies.

the actual religion, Vodun practiced in Benin, Haiti, Dominican Republic and various centers in the US – largely where Haitian refugees have settled. an evil, imaginary religion, which we will call Voodoo. It has been created for Hollywood movies, complete with “ voodoo dolls”, violence, bizarre rituals, etc. It does not exist in reality, except in the minds of most non-Voduns.

History of Vodun in the West Slaves were baptized into the Roman Catholic Church upon their arrival in Haiti and other West Indian islands. However, there was little Christian infrastructure present during the early 19th century to maintain the faith. The result was that the slaves largely followed original native faith. This they practiced in secret, even while attending Mass regularly. An inaccurate and sensational book (S.

St. John, “ Haiti or the Black Republic”) was written in 1884. It described Vodun as a profoundly evil religion, and included lurid descriptions of human sacrifice, cannibalism, etc., some of which had been extracted from Vodun

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priests by torture. This book caught the imagination of people outside the West Indies, and was responsible for much of the misunderstanding and fear that is present today. Hollywood found this a rich source for Voodoo screen plays. Horror movies began in the 1930's and continue today to misrepresent Vodun. It is only since the late 1950's that accurate studies by anthropologists have been published.

Other religions (Macumba, Candomble, Umbanda and Santeria) bear many similarities to Vodun. Vodun Beliefs Vodun, like Christianity, is a religion of many traditions. Each group follows a different spiritual path and worships a slightly different pantheon of spirits, called Loa.

The word means “mystery” in the Yoruba language. Yoruba traditional belief included a chief God Olorun, who is remote and unknowable. He authorized a lesser God Obatala to create the earth and all life forms. A battle between the two Gods led to Obatala's temporary banishment. There are hundreds of minor spirits. Those which originated from Dahomey are called Rada; those who were added later are often deceased leaders in the new world and are called Petro. Some of these are Agwe: spirit of the sea Aida Wedo: rainbow spirit Ayza: protector Baka: an evil spirit who takes the form of an animal Baron Samedi: guardian of the grave Dambala (or Damballah-wedo): serpent spirit Erinle: spirit of the forests Ezili (or Erzulie): female spirit of love Mawu Lisa: spirit of creation Ogou Balanjo: spirit of healing Ogun (or Ogu Bodagris): spirit of war Osun: spirit of healing streams Sango (or Shango): spirit of storms Yemanja: female spirit of waters Zaka (or Oko): spirit of agriculture

There are a number of points of similarity between Roman Catholicism and Vodun: both believe in a supreme being the Loa resemble Christian Saints, in

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that they were once people who led exceptional lives, and are usually given a single responsibility or special attribute.

both believe in an afterlife both have as the centerpoint of their ceremony a ritual sacrifice and consumption of flesh and blood both believe in the existence of invisible evil spirits or demons followers of Vodun believe that each person has a met tet (master of the head) which corresponds to a Christian's patron saint. Followers of Vodun believe that each person has a soul which is composed of two parts: a gros bon ange or "big guardian angel", and a ti bon ange or "little guardian angel". The latter leaves the body during sleep and when the person is possessed by a Loa during a ritual. There is a concern that the ti