Gifts to Balangandã:
Afro-Brazilian Culture Performed by Stanford Students

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Course Overview

• Comparative racial issues between Brazil and the U.S.
• Afro-Brazilian history
• Historical survey of the slave trade system and slavery in Brazil
• Sociological and literary approach to Afro-Brazilian culture by reading novels, short stories, and critical essays on race
• Study of Afro-Brazilian cultural production through different media
Student Participation

Diverse student demographic (undergraduate and graduate from Comp. Race and Ethnicity, Film and Media Studies, Latin American Studies, Iberian and Latin Am. Cultures, International Relations, Economics, Sociology, Biology, Political Science, Tech., History)

• High enrollment (18)
• Project Based Learning
Pedagogical Strategies

1. Fictional Narrative/Storytelling (Balangandã)
2. Thematic Team Work
3. Production of an Artistic/Cultural Object (Gift to Balangandã)
4. Present their gift in a final public exhibition
5. Written component
6. Cultural Workshops with Guest Speakers:
Pedagogical Strategies

1. Fictional Narrative/Storytelling (Balangandã)

• Planning backwards beginning with course goals we set with the students

• Brings the study of Brazilian culture to life for students through fictional narrative, in contrast to historical narrative. Students create art, music and dance and offer them as gifts to an imagined great-great-great-great grandmother Balangandã.

• An experience that offers the students a deep understanding of the suffering, courage and resistance of the African presence in Brazil and the Americas.
Balangandã

A votive and affective object that African women pinned on their skirts as a form of protection.

“Stanford researchers find that modern humans originated from south Africa”
Jou jou Balangandan - Joao Gilberto e Rita Lee
2. Thematic Team Work

Maintain course structure through weekly readings, yet provide flexibility according to students’ interests.

• Groups:
  • Afro-Brazilian Music (samba, rap, etc.)
  • Afro-Brazilian Rituals (Capoeira and Candomblé)
  • Afro-Brazilian National Spectacle (Soccer and Carnaval)
  • Afro-Brazilian Films and Literary Texts
3. Production of an Artistic/Cultural Object (Gift to Balangandã)

In the same thematic groups, students create a gift to be offered to Balangandã to remind her about her past life in Brazil

Examples: Music, Video Production, Altar, Poster....
4. Present their gift in a final public exhibition

A Gift to Balangandã.

- Public engagement: their work has value outside of an academic context
Poster for the Final Public Exhibition

WED. JUNE 1 - 11AM-1PM
BUILDING 50 ROOM 51A

The students of BLACK BRAZIL (IIAC: 1945)

PRESENT THEIR GIFTS TO BALANGANDÁ:
REPRESENTING BRAZIL'S BLACK HERITAGE
"Lixo Luxo" ("Luxury Trash") by: Andre Zollinger and James Bennett

"....we combined the use of humble objects with high technology. We employed empty beer bottles, sticks, whispering, plastic bags, and scrap metal to create the different track layers. [We also] downloaded Youtube clips of music from Pixinguinha, a pandeiro, a cuíca, a trumpet, and music from the rap group, Racionais MCs."
Parody of Brazilian Film, "Xica da Silva"
An Altar: Brazilian Religious Syncretism

With elements from Afro-Candomblé, indigenous rituals, and Christianity
Original Artwork by Brenda Mutuma
5. Written Component

• weekly responses and debates using Coursework Forum
• Two Writing Assignments analyzing a novel and a scholarly book on race in Brazil and in the US;
• a final report written as a personal letter to Balangandã
Letters to Balangandã (excerpts)

Cara Balangadã,

Thank you for being my grandmother. (...) You gave me life; for this, I will forever be indebted to you. (...) For me, making the gift was a gift in itself, because it permitted me to learn so much about my own history... — James Bennet

Yoruba, Ewe, Fanti-Ashanti, Ga-Adangbe, Igbo, Fon, or Mandinka. Mother, what land are you from? What people are you? I know you do not remember, and neither do we. Mamãe, the colonizers tried to bury your history, and they made you a child of the sea. But still your culture lives on. You live. (...) — Tanaka Mawindi
Cultural Workshops with Guest Speakers:

• Carolina Moraes-Liu, filmmaker from Bahia
• Gamo da Paz, Traditional Drummer and Candomblé master, who taught basic drumming rhythms
Ebony Goddess
Presentation and discussion with filmmaker, Carolina Moraes-Liu
Guest Speaker and Performer: Gamo da Paz
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