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*The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (review)

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of urban inhabitants, and the tremendous growth of the urban population and the general expansion of Buenos Aires contributed to its ability to attack individuals. Furthermore, people tended to resist the kinds of public-health campaigns designed to limit the spread of contagious diseases, such as the prohibition of spitting in the subways and on the streets, the formulation of strict guidelines to care for infants and young children, and efforts to separate families from ill loved ones. These stories are poignant and resonate today regarding the efficacy of behavior modification for contagious diseases.

This work is rich in personal anecdotes and depth of field, showing the resonance of disease in music, theater, poetry, and sports. Although not a book for those unacquainted with the history of Buenos Aires, it is most welcome for those interested in the social history of disease, and specialists in the history of Argentina.

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*The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti.* By Kate Ramsey (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011) 425 pp. \$45.00

Anthropological studies of Haitian popular religion are legion, but few of them deal with its history other than to claim for it an important role in the revolution of 1791 to 1804, which ended slavery and made Haiti the Americas' second independent state. This impressive book provides an ethnologically informed history of Vodou with a particular focus on the politics of law. In four chapters of increasing length, Ramsey deals with the colonial and revolutionary periods, the nineteenth century, the U.S. occupation from 1915 to 1934, and the debates of the following decade surrounding an emergent cultural nationalism. Ramsey's central problem is to explain why the state only intermittently enforced the laws that criminalized popular ritual practices from colonial times until the 1987 constitution. The plasticity of the term *vaudou* and the vague wording of the laws, which failed to distinguish sorcery from familial and communal religious practice, provide much of the answer. The likelihood that state agents at the local level participated in such practices was another factor, as was the incorporation of elements of Catholicism into Vodou.

The first, briefest chapter is a solid and judicious overview of magico-religious practices during the period of slavery. Relying on printed, mainly secondary, sources, Ramsey surveys the development of legal prohibitions and the controversy regarding Vodou and the Haitian Revolution. The focus is political rather than cultural. In the post-independence period, the state continued to fear the subversive potential of popular religion and perhaps the detrimental influence of its celebrations on agricultural productivity, but new motives also inflected its

criminalization. Although denigration of popular culture underpinned the new elite's claim to power and its exploitation of the masses, the sensitivity of this elite to foreign opinion reinforced the state's desire to condemn "barbarous" practices that increasingly shaped Haiti's international image. Ramsey stresses that such restrictions often had broad popular support when they targeted sorcery or, as in the notorious Bizoton case of 1864, reputed anthropophagy. Yet most of the major campaigns against popular religion were spearheaded by foreigners—the French-dominated Catholic Church or the American occupying forces.

The two twentieth-century chapters, which draw on various archives and Ramsey's oral interviews, are the most deeply researched and original. Ramsey highlights the American military's discursive use of "voodooism" in justifying at different levels its actions in Haiti and in depicting the varied ways in which Haitians responded. The book climaxes with the development of the black-nationalist indigenist movement of the 1920s and 1930s and the state's diverse reaction to it, which included more precisely worded legal prohibitions, the last of the drum-burning anti-superstition campaigns, and official efforts to package popular religion as folklore. These years also saw an upsurge in U.S. anthropological interest in Haiti, as well as the appearance of the "zombi flick." An epilogue briefly extends the narrative into the era of the Duvalier governments.

This richly detailed and sophisticated study, supported by 150 pages of notes, extends the work of Hurbon and makes an original argument about the interaction of law, culture, and development.<sup>1</sup>

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*Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400–1948.* By Paul S. Landau (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010) 300 pp. \$90.00

The marked interdisciplinary flavor of this innovative and important book makes it particularly appropriate for engagement by readers of this journal. Landau's research design focuses on intensive scrutiny of the origins of southern African languages and political alliances, using mission records, early travelers' accounts, and correspondence, as well as oral traditions and interviews and archeological evidence. He deploys research techniques from history, historical linguistics, and religious and mission studies. By centering on the southern highveld (South Africa, Lesotho, and Botswana) and the Moroka clan in particular, Landau is able to use his Setswana language skills to draw wide comparative lessons. European missionaries from the early nineteenth century onward encountered people who had joined together politically despite their differing ancestry. Analysis of names strongly suggests "tribal" words were, in fact, situ-

1 See, for example, Laënnec Hurbon, *Le Barbare imaginaire* (Paris, 1988).