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**Vodou (Voodoo) - I**

**Lead: Originating in the ancient indigenous cultures of Africa and merged with many characteristics of Roman Catholicism in the early years of slavery, Vodou is practiced by many in Haiti and in the Haitian diaspora.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: One of the first places Christopher Columbus landed in the New World was the island he called Hispaniola. He enslaved the native Arawak population and set them to looking for gold, but the gold did not materialize, and the indigenous**

**people soon died off due to disease and overwork. The island had potential, however, and after 1697 when Spain surrendered the western third to France in the Treaty of Rijswijk, the population and wealth of the colony began to expand. The newly designated Saint-Domingue became France's richest outpost in the New World, shipping huge quantities of coffee, indigo, cotton and especially sugar. To work the plantations of the island, France imported thousands of slaves from west Africa, particularly Dahomey, now Benin, Togo and Ghana. By 1800 there were almost 600,000 slaves in Saint-Domingue.**

**To deal with the horrors of slavery**

**and the strange new environment of the Caribbean, most of the slaves clung to their ancient ethnic religious customs and beliefs known in the Dahoman dialect of Fon as Vodou a word meaning “spirit,” anglicized to the more familiar spelling, voodoo. This brought them into direct conflict with their French owners, outnumbered 10 to 1, who feared that any independent religious activity might make the slaves resistant to control. It also conflicted with the largely unsuccessful evangelistic efforts of Roman Catholic missionaries of the Capuchin and Jesuit orders. Attempts to suppress Vodou were brutal and sadistic. Any overt signs of Vodou practice were met with flogging, castration, and the**

**occasional burning at the stake. Next time: going underground.**

**Research by Peggy Arthur-Christmas, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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