

SANTERIA (Path of the Saints)

Like most branches of the voodoo religion, Santeria (or La Regla Lucumi) spread from Africa and the slave trade, reaching such destinations as the Caribbean, Haiti, Cuba and the southern United States.

Cuba's distinctive santeria syncretised the old deities-called orishas - of the Yoruba tribe with saints of Roman Catholicism. For example, Ellegua with St. Anthony, Orula with St. Francis of Assisi and Ochun with Our Lady of Charity. This was a purely pragmatic solution to the slaves' need to mask their native religion, not uncommon when pagan beliefs confronted Christianity. Santeria developed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, though Miami's practising santeros were supplemented by the exodus of political refugees from Fidel Castro's Cuba during the Mariel boatlift in 1980. One leading santeria priest (babalawo) has estimate that there are 20,000 such priests in Miami, serving the needs of more than 100,000 santeros.

Santeros believe in a single god called Olorun (or Olodumare) which is the fount of all the universe's spiritual energy (ashe). This god communicates to the world through the orishas, which represent all human life and the forces of nature. Followers of the religion in turn communicate with the orishas through prayer, ritual and sacrifice (ebo), in order to make their requests for help. However, in order to reach this stage the initiate (lyawo) must follow an exacting regime and prove a full knowledge of the songs, rituals and language (Lucumi) of santeria. So strict is this rite of passage that the lyawo must dress entirely in white for the first year, must not touch or be touched by anybody, must not look in a mirror or go out at night.

The strong tradition of santeria 'magic' is based on belief in the power and wisdom of the orishas and their ability to influence the destinies of humankind. Santeria shares many similarities with other magical cults in that it concentrates on an individual's personal requirements. Ceremonies are performed to help acquire wealth and power, or even lay curses (sometimes even death) on enemies. One curious example was the santeria altar found in 1990 by troops when they arrested Panama's president (and major drug-dealer) Manuel Noriega. The altar at Noriega's office in Panama City was adorned with curse effigies of the US President Ronald Reagan and Vice-President George Bush. There were also lists of names to be cursed, including those of American Attorney General Dick Thornborough and William Hoeveler, the federal district court judge who presided over the Noriega case.

Sacrifice is fundamental to the religion of the santeros, and though the offerings are not invariably animal sacrifices, creatures are always sacrificed at important rituals. It is essential that animals used in this way are treated with great respect-they are after all, the property of the orisha. At the opening of the ceremony it is the general intention to express, in song and action, the belief that all life and all death are sacred, and that one day the celebrants will die as has the animal.

Although most santeros consider their religion harmless and above-board, there is some evidence that along with the essential animal sacrifices some groups have indulged in the blood-sacrifice of human beings.



No, don't let him, or you might "wake up" and find yourself a member of

SATAN'S
End Time REVIVAL



Submit yourself to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7 K.J.V.