

Center for American and World Cultures

Fall 2008 Series – Oxford campus

“Religion and Community”

Paul Christopher Johnson, Director, Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History; Associate Professor, Department of History, Center for Afro-American and African Studies, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

Thursday, October 14

4:30 p.m. 128 Pearson Hall

“Joining the African Diaspora: Caribbean Religion ‘At Home’ and in New York” Lecture

Diasporic religious actors “make history” by projecting present events, and their present selves, against the horizon of another territory and time. By *joining* diasporas and *becoming* diasporic, societies may change the configuration and meaning of their religious, ethnic and even racial identifications in the present. This talk will present ritual events of the Garifuna, historically known as the “Black Caribs,” who are descendants both of Africans and of Island Carib Amerindians, as well as those of other Caribbean groups. By comparing the return of ancestral spirits during rituals performed in Caribbean villages and with those mounted in the US, the lecture shows how the Garifuna activate memories of varying diasporic horizons. Garifuna in New York have begun to reevaluate notions of their past, coming to view themselves as members of the African Diaspora, in ways that homeland villagers have not. As emigrants have begun carrying this new identity back to the homeland, conflicts have emerged between competing visions of the authentic traditional past—one as purely “African,” the other as “Carib.” By becoming diasporic, and joining a diaspora through religion, these emigrants do not just seek out a past that waits to be discovered, they take part in creating it.

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