NEH Application Cover Sheet (FA-251528) Fellowships for University Teachers

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Field of expertise: Latin American History

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APPLICATION INFORMATION

Title: "Fera Bestia: Sorcery as History in the Haitian-Dominican Borderlands"

Grant period:	From 2017-01-01 to 2018-01-31
Project field(s):	Latin American History; Rural Studies; Cultural History

Description of project: This proposal seeks twelve months of support for completion of a book manuscript on sorcery narratives as a form of historical memory in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, a project that brings the cultural meanings of animals into the social and environmental history of Latin America and the Caribbean. The final product will be a book with supplemental oral history video clips that I plan to submit to Duke University Press.

REFERENCE LETTERS

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NEH Supplemental Information for Individuals

This form should be used by applicants to the NEH Fellowships, Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan, Awards for Faculty, and Summer Stipends Programs.

Field of Project:	History: Latin American History
Field of Project #2:	Interdisciplinary: Rural Studies
Field of Project #3:	History: Cultural History
Project Director Field	d of Study: History: Latin American History
The mailing address	provided on the SF 424-Individual is for your \Box work \boxtimes home
Institutional	Affiliation
Are you affiliated wit	h an institution? (If yes, provide information below.) \square Yes \square No
Institution Name:	University of California, Los Angeles
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Employer/Taxpay	ver Identification Number (EIN/TIN): (b) (4)
Status:	🛛 Senior Scholar 🗌 Junior Scholar

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Title:	Professor	
Department Name:	Department of History	

Nominating Official (Summer Stipends Applicants Only)

Are you exempt from nomination? If not, provide information below.

First Name:		
Last Name:		
Email:		
Title:		
Institution:		

"Fera Bestia: Sorcery as History in the Haitian-Dominican Borderlands"

NEH proposal Lauren Derby, Associate Professor of History, University of California at Los Angeles 23 April 2016

This proposal seeks twelve months of support for completion of a book manuscript on sorcery narratives as a form of historical memory in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, a project that brings the cultural meanings of animals into the social and environmental history of Latin America and the Caribbean. The final product will be a book with supplemental oral history video clips that I plan to submit to Duke University Press.

Research Statement

The project treats stories about a particularly feared genre of shape-shifting phenomena called *bacá*—hybrid beasts that steal farm animals, harvests and cash. Bacás are creatures created by sorcerers which enable people to become dogs, cats, pigs and goats and amass wealth. In the Dominican central frontier town of Bánica, Elias Piña, butchers told me about sheep that meowed, goats with pigs' tails, and bulls that cried like a baby -- animals which were really bacás (baka in Kreyol) or spirit animals. I heard haunting stories about invisible visitations, struggles in the bush with virile men who fought off these beasts, as well as ranchers and butchers' tales about bacás that eviscerated their herds and drained their cash. I even encountered a curandera (healer) who boasted that she could make one for me. These narratives might be classed within the genre of Latin American devil-pact lore, except that bacás are also said to protect one's crops or beasts, so they are powerful but ambivalent, sometimes working for good..

Clearly werewolves are "good to think with" as Claude Lévi-Strauss would say, but what can they tell us? They are evidence of a culture of proximity with death characteristic of central West African Kikongo culture, one in which the portal between this world and the next one is always slightly ajar. Yet I argue that these stories of animal demons are also related to the phenomenology of interspecies contact and labor in an environment in which animals have long been a constant affective presence in everyday life. If popular culture in Bánica revolves a lot around animals it is because this region was long based on extensive cattle ranching (with herds traversing the borderline) and today most residents work with livestock, as plebian farm hands care for and sell cattle, pigs and goats, and Haitian women raise and sell guinea fowl and poultry alongside produce at market.

In Michael Taussigs' classic formulation in The Devil and Commodity Fetishism, these stories would be classed as devil pact tales, an analytic which reduces them to one singular defining motif of the stories. While many of my narratives critique excessive and exogenous profit, there is much more going on than just a popular commentary on capitalism. These stories also invoke a now vanished ecosystem - the feral ecology created when Columbus deposited dogs, cattle and pigs to provision his men at Hispaniola. Bacá spirit demons appear as wild cattle, pigs and dogs and often alight on ceiba, mahogany or ebony trees, which are today extinct species of wood. These spirit demons thus represent a landscape of memory that invokes strong feelings of terror as well as nostalgia and loss due to the particular histories it conjures up; thus I am arguing that sorcery can be analyzed as a source for popular history, and also that it enables us to excavate the emotional resonance of historical events. I am building upon Taussig's work to consider how this genre of storytelling can convey popular meanings and emotions as they relate to particular places, historical events and the animals associated with them. The shelter for these feral beasts is the forest, a place so closely tied to pigs that the size of forests in France and Spain was measured by the amount of swine they could sustain. For the itinerant Dominican peasantry roaming on state lands, pigs and cattle rather than private plots became mobile markers of place.

Contribution

The scholarly literature on the Caribbean has long focused on the sugar plantation economies that long dominated this region. Far less attention had been paid to the subcultures of resistance that

emerged in the shadow of the plantation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Notwithstanding the fact that Hispaniola became the first black ranching frontier in the Americas, the basis of Iberian cattle expansion to New Spain, Florida and coastal South America, the Hispanic Caribbean is often characterized as lacking history until its turn towards sugar. This project explores the cultural residue left by the fugitive subcultures based on the hunting commons that sustained a flourishing backwoods contraband trade and squatter lifestyle during the colonial period on Hispaniola. This extensive ranching frontier was largely left to fend by itself, culled by skilled freedman vaqueros of African origin. Indeed, the Dominican Republic was the epicenter of a thriving contraband economy run by "masterless men" in the leather trade which furnished provisions and hides for the illicit pirates and freebooters that long frequented the region. Traces of this fugitive hunting ecology lasted into the twentieth century due to the low demographic density and the continuing presence of forest cover in the Dominican Republic. Yet notwithstanding the importance of this furtive subculture, it has not been adequately studied due to its low status, as well as the fact that there is far less archival material on contraband practices. Sidney Mintz has located the birth of creole culture in the interstices of the plantation, where slave women grew food crops to feed their families and trade, yet the "reconstituted peasantry" of the Dominican Republic was forged in the hunting economy of the mountainous highlands of the forested interior, a feral animal commons that enabled men to live outside of slavery when the rest of the Caribbean was still subjugated, and dark skin was a definitive marker of unfree status.

The scholarly focus on sugar has overshadowed the important hunting subcultures that consolidated during a period that drew together European deserters, runaway slaves and Indians reliant upon the large feral herds of swine and cattle that Columbus left behind. Indeed, the Dominican Republic was the epicenter of a thriving contraband economy which furnished provisions and hides for the illicit pirates and freebooters that frequented the region. Santo Domingo also became an important stop on the mule trade circuit by the seventeenth century as interior creoles expanded from cattle into the livestock contraband networks that reached as far as Venezuela. In the eighteenth century, the entire Dominican economy was rerouted to provide cattle and oxen to neighboring Saint Domingue (today Haiti), as it became the jewel in the crown of the French empire with its flourishing sugar economy.

I argue that these bacá werecreatures might be seen as "embodied memories" of an economy that provided free access to the hunting of wild pigs, goats and cattle in the forested interior and which long sustained this region and its poor. I consider bacá talk as a genre of embodied historical memory of the past, one which is conveyed by the history and poetics of the particular forms these spirits inhabit, from dogs, pigs, cattle and extinct species of wood. These werecreatures should be seen as historical rather than merely folkloric due to the fact that the syntax of these spirit demon hosts corresponds to the real history of animals on the island. Bacás appear in various animal forms, yet they conjure very different threat perceptions depending upon whether they present as dogs, pigs or cattle. Indeed, if the dog on Hispaniola has become a figure of predation, this may well derive from the particular history of dogs on the island since they were first and foremost tools of subjugation, first deployed against the Indian slaves, later the rebelling slaves when the slave revolt became the Haitian revolution in the 1790s. By sharp contrast, bacá pig narratives are haunting tales conjuring a deep sense of loss and nostalgia for creole swine expressive of a particular culture of intimacy with the pig as a symbol of home and its associated emotional resonance; in the central frontier the pig was the basis of the subsistence economy. The pig's rooting behavior and its associations with the underworld may explain its link to the spirits, rendering the creole pig bacá more like a spirit double or familiar than a demon. During slavery, pigs became a ubiquitous feature of the provision grounds since slaves were rarely given meat.

My project documents a long durée codependence upon animals that helps explain and contextualize the extraordinary prominence of pigs, cattle and goats in Dominican and Haitian popular lore, from tall tales to shape-shifting beliefs. In this vein, I hope to contribute to environmental history's interest in the entanglements of nature and culture. This form of historical

excavation is also an act of witnessing because the feral ecoscape of Hispaniola is now gone, since the hutia, manatí, and wild cattle were promiscuously slaughtered, and the last creole boars were eviscerated by USAID in 1979 due to swine flu.

Methods and Research Plan

I received a Burkhardt grant from the American Council of Learned Societies in 2010 during which time I commenced research for the project at the Huntington Library. I have made ten short trips to Elias Piña in the Dominican Republic as well as Thomassique and Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where I collected over 80 hours of oral histories which form the foundation for the project, which I have contextualized through long durée data analysis using eighteenth and nineteenth century works by Moreau de St. Mery, botanists such as Michel Étienne Descourtilz, Robert Schomburgk and George Schweinfurth, and twentieth century agricultural records. I have five chapters drafted, and am writing short versions of the final two chapters for conferences this spring. With a research leave, I will be able to write the introduction and conclusion and revise the eight chapters of the book. I also plan to continue uploading short clips of several of my anonymized oral histories cited in the book on You Tube to evidence the performative aspect of my argument about storytelling, and for oral history teaching purposes. The chapter outline is as follows:

I. Introduction. Fugitive Speech Forms as a Source for Caribbean History

2. Hispaniola, Hunting and the People without History

2. Big Men and Tall Tails: Masculinity on the Margins of Modernity

3. Memento Mori: Creole Pigs as Forest Phantasms

4. Black Dogs as Trauma Revenants

5. The Mysterious Murder of Javier: Politics, Sorcery and the Cattle Trade

6. From Bois Caïman to Büche du Noel: Shapeshifter Trees

7. City of the Dead: Demonic Turkeys in Port-au-Prince

8. Ota's Travels: Rumors of Race and Speciation in the Atlantic World

8. Conclusion

Competency and Skills

I have been conducting research on the Haitian-Dominican border for 25 years, and this project builds upon my longstanding interest in sorcery and popular rumor in the Caribbean. I warmed up to the completion of this book through a series of recent essays. One of the chapters in my book, *The Dictator's Seduction*, treated bacá rumors in the Dominican Republic, as does my piece, "The Devil Wears Dockers;" and "La ciudad de los muertos" considers stories of women turning into lougarou and snatching babies after the 2010 Haitian earthquake. "Imperial Idols" examines the French origins of Haitian shape-shifting lore. I have written an essay on animals and environmental history, "Bringing the Animals Back in;" and "Trujillo, the Goat," treats the history and lore of feral goats in the Dominican Republic. I also have an essay on popular rumor as a source for Caribbean history, "Beyond Fugitive Speech," and previous essays on other Caribbean rumors and the Haitian-Dominican border. I speak Spanish, French and Haitian Kreyol and have completed all the necessary research for the book.

Final Product and Dissemination

The final product will be a book that contributes to our understanding of the meaning of species loss in ecological change, as well as the place of local knowledge in social and environmental history. I have been contacted by several editors (

), but I plan to submit a proposal to because of the cross-disciplinary nature of this work which will be of interest to scholars of environmental history, environmental humanities, literature, folklore, Latin American and Caribbean history. In the second secon

Bibliography

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negros criollos y el pueblo de Cuba. Miami: Colección de Chicherekú, 1986.
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usuelles des colonies françaises, anglaises, español et portugaises. Paris: Chez L'Editeur, 1833.
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Peasant Narratives," Cultural Anthropology 9, No. 1 (Feb. 1994): 58-93.
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historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue. Paris: Sociéte de l'Histoire del Colonies Françaises
et Librarie Larose, 1958.
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1900. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
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North Carolina Press, 1980.
Smith, Jay M Monsters of the Gévaudan: The Making of a Beast, Cambridge: Harvard University
Press, 2011.
White, Luise. Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa. Berkeley: University
of California Press, 2000.
Willerslev, Rane. Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs,
Participa

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. Varner, John Grier and Jeannette Johnson Varner. *Dogs of the Conquest*. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1983.

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EDUCATION

- 1985-97 Ph.D., University of Chicago with distinction.
- 1983 Brown University. Graduated with Honors in Development Studies.
- 1980-1 University of Dar es Salaam. Tanzania, East Africa. Spent year abroad studying African sociology, politics and rural development.

HONORS, AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2011 "After the Earthquake: Popular Memory as History in Haiti." LASA/FORD Special Project Grant. Trained 30 students from the State University of Haiti in oral history methodology and conducted life narratives of the earthquake in the tent camps for the refugees of the 2010 earthquake in Port- au-Prince, Haiti. Launching a public database of the material collected.
- 2010-11 *Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo* (Duke, 2009), winner of the Bolton-Johnson Prize from the Council on Latin American History, American Historical Association; co-winner of the Gordon K. and Sybil Lewis Award from the Caribbean Studies Association Award; and honorable mention, Bryce Wood Book Award from the Latin American Studies Association.
- 2010-11 Frederick Burkhardt Award, American Council of Learned Societies, for project entitled "*Boca del Chivo*: Demonic Animals and the Poetics of Trauma on Hispaniola."
- 1995 *Conference on Latin American History Award* (given by the Latin Americanist division of the American Historical Association) for best Latin American History article in English for essay entitled, "Haitians, Magic and Money: Raza and Society in the Haitian-Dominican Borderlands, 1900-1937," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*.
- 1994-5 Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship for dissertation write-up.
- 1992 Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program Fellowship. Grant awarded for one year of dissertation research.
- 1991-3 International Doctoral Research Fellowship in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, from the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies. Six-month supplement to the Fulbright for dissertation research.
- 1987-88 IIE Fulbright Collaborative Grant, for project entitled "Haitian Migration and the National Question in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1950." With Richard Turits. Research focused on a massacre of 20,000 Haitian peasants living on Dominican border territory in 1937. Study included archival research and extensive interviewing in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Washington D.C., Miami and New York. Extension granted to complete research.

PUBLICATIONS

Work in Progress: Book Manuscripts

"Fera Bestia: Sorcery as History in the Haitian-Dominican Borderlands."

- "Shapeshifing as History: Atlantic Crosscurrents of People, Nature and Gender." Editor, collection of essays by Debora Silverman, David Pratten, Marcy Norton, Martha Few, Allen Roberts, and Vicky Van Bockhaven. In development.
- "La seducción del dictador: Política e imaginación popular en la República Dominicana," translated by Rosmina Valdés-Cassá into Spanish for publication by the Dominican Academy of History, Santo Domingo, June, 2016. Foreword by Frank Moya Pons.

Published Works: Books

- *The Dominican Republic Reader*. Co-edited with Eric Roorda and Raymundo González. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. 400 pages with 82 images.
- *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World. Co-edited with Andrew Apter, Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010.

Research Articles/Chapters

- 2015 "Imperial Idols: French and U.S. Revenants in Haitian *Vodou*," *History of Religions* 54, No. 4 (May): 394-422. Special issue on the global occult edited by Nile Green.
- 2014 "Beyond Fugitive Speech: Rumor and Affect in Caribbean History," Small Axe 44: 123-140.
- 2013 "Trujillo, el chivo. De fieras, hombres y política en la República Dominicana." Sociales (Comisión de Ciencias Sociales, Academia de Ciencias de la República Dominicana), No. 6, pp. 73- 106, translation of "Trujillo, the Goat. Of Beasts and Men in the Dominican Republic," Centering Animals: Writing Animals into Latin American History, edited by Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici, 2013, Durham: Duke University Press: 302-328.
- 2013 "The Devil Wears Dockers: Devil Pacts, Trade Zones and Rural–Urban Ties in the Dominican Republic," co-authored with Marion Werner, *New West Indian Guide* 87 (3): 294-321.
- 2013 "On Revolutionary Dirt in Haiti," *Wild Things: Nature and the Social Imagination*, William Beinart, Karen Middleton, and Simon Pooley, eds., Isle of Harris, UK: White Horse Press: 239-264.
- 2012 "La ciudad de los muertos: Los rumores como creadores de opinión pública en Puerto Principe, Haiti," *Istor: Revista de Historia Internacional* (Mexico) in special issue on public opinion in Latin America ed. by Carlos Bravo Regidor, XVIII, No. 50, Fall: 37-55.
- 2012 "Haitians in the Dominican Republic: Race, Politics and Neoliberalism," in *Afrodescendents, Identity and the Struggle for Development in the Americas*, Bernd Reiter and Kimberly Eison Simmons, eds., Michigan State University Press, 51-66.
- 2011 "Bringing the Animals Back In: Writing Quadrupeds into Caribbean History," *History Compass* 9/8: 602-621.
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- 2009 "The Strange Career of Minerva Bernardino: Pan American and United Nations Women's Rights Activist," co-authored with Ellen Dubois, *Women's Studies International Forum* 32, No. 1: 43-50. Special issue on Transnational Feminism: Historical Perspectives, Katie Oliviero and Ellen Dubois, eds..
- 2008 "Imperial Secrets: Vampires and Nationhood in Puerto Rico," in *A Religion of Fools? Superstition in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, Steven A. Smith and Alan Knight, eds., Oxford: Past and Present supplement 199: 290-312.
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- 2005 "Vampiros del imperio, o por qué el Chupacabras acecha las Américas," *Culturas Imperiales: Experiencia y representación en América, Africa y Asia*, Ricardo Salvatorre ed., Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 317-344.
- 2003 "In the Shadow of the State: The Politics of Denunciation and Panegyric during the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 8, 2 (May): 295-344.
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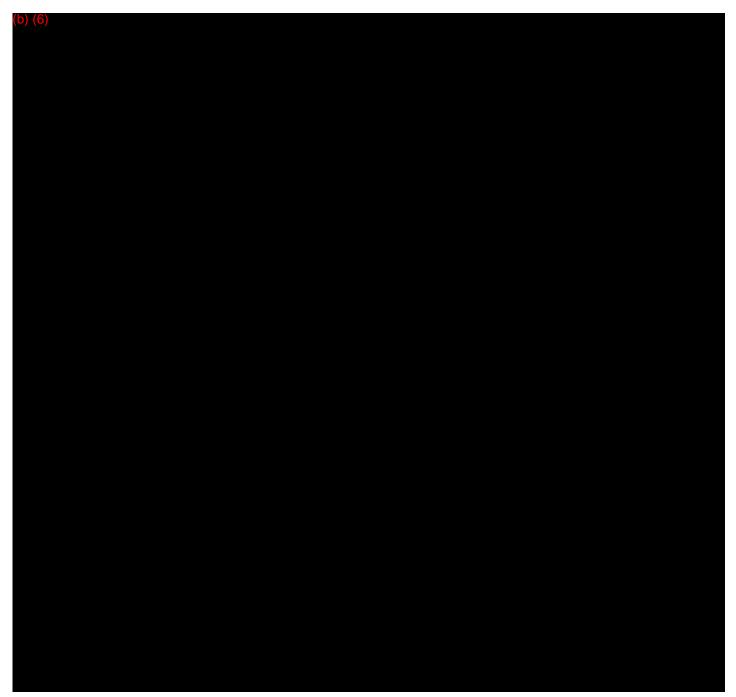
Languages: Spanish (fluent), Haitian Creole (good), French (good), Portuguese (fair).



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May 30, 2016

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