



Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie

By Wade Davis

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In 1982, Harvard-trained ethnobotanist Wade Davis traveled into the Haitian countryside to research reports of zombies--the infamous living dead of Haitian folklore. A report by a team of physicians of a verifiable case of zombification led him to try to obtain the poison associated with the process and examine it for potential medical use.

Interdisciplinary in nature, this study reveals a network of power relations reaching all levels of Haitian political life. It sheds light on recent Haitian political history, including the meteoric rise under Duvalier of the Tonton Macoute. By explaining zombification as a rational process within the context of traditional Vodoun society, Davis demystifies one of the most exploited of folk beliefs, one that has been used to denigrate an entire people and their religion.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Haitian zombification, a subject that has provoked a great deal of sensational reporting in the popular press and skepticism in anthropological circles, is analyzed in this fascinating work. The author delves into its physiological, social, and psychological impact, the result of two years of on-site study of the structure and function of the Bizango secret societies. He presents an extensive analysis of the chemical composition of various poisons reputed to induce a physiological state that could simulate death. To transform a person so affected into a zombie through antidotes is part of the pharmacopoeia of the Bizango societies. Of interest both to social scientists and the medical profession. Winnie Lambrecht, Brown Univ., Providence, R.I. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Review

[A] fascinating book.

"American Scientist"

A remarkable journey into the natural and supernatural world of the zombie.

"Brittonia"

Davis manages to demystify the concepts 'voodoo' and 'zombie.'

"New York Times Book Review"

Davis offers the only firsthand account of the structure and functions of clandestine Bizango societies.

"Choice"

Moves far beyond formula or sensationalism and directly confronts the 'why' of the zombie phenomenon.

"Western Folklore"

YA" fascinating book.

"American Scientist"

Review

A remarkable journey into the natural and supernatural world of the zombie.--*Brittonia*

Davis manages to demystify the concepts 'voodoo' and 'zombie' and to make the people involved with these cultural practices seem a little more human, a little less bizarre and incomprehensible.--*New York Times Book Review*

Davis offers the only firsthand account of the structure and functions of clandestine Bizango societies. . . . Evidence is also presented to justify the claim that Bizango societies may be a key to understanding recent Haitian political history.--*Choice*

Moves far beyond formula or sensationalism and directly confronts the 'why' of the zombie phenomenon--*Western Folklore*

[A] fascinating book. . . . The author has gone to great lengths to show that zombification is a highly complex and carefully executed social process.--*American Scientist*

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Marjorie Thompson:

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