

America's Multifaceted Folk Medicines

Session 8

Florida-Louisiana Gulf Region

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Florida-Louisiana Gulf Region

Plan for Session 8

- Brief History of the areas and cultures.
- Seminole Indians
- Beliefs and practices
- Afro-Cuban Religions: Santería, Palo
- Voodoo: Haiti, Jamaica, Louisiana
- Acadian Medicine.
- Herbal medicines.

Palo

Regla de Ocha-Ifá

AFRO-CUBAN RELIGIONS

Afro-Cuban Religions

- Afro-Cuban religions, widely practiced by blacks and whites in and out of the island are known as *Reglas* (Rules).
- In Cuba, the most important *Reglas* are directly related with the 2 large Afro-Cuban cultural systems
 - *Kongo*, of Bantu origin: *Palo*
 - *Lucumí*, of Yoruba origin: *Santería*, *Regla de Ocha*

Palo

- *Palo*=Stick: refers to the use of wooden sticks in the preparation of altars.
- Two basic pillars:
 - 1. The veneration of the spirits.
 - 2. The belief in natural powers and earth powers.
- All natural objects, mainly sticks, are infused with powers, linked to the powers of spirits.

Palo

- Syncretism with Catholicism is prevalent within Palo because the Kingdom of the Congo adopted the Catholic religion as early as the 15th century.
- 2 socio-political beliefs in Cuba:
 - *Palo Cristiano* (Christian *Palo*) uses the Cross & images of Catholic saints as representations of the spirits.
 - *Palo Judio* (Jewish *Palo*) does not have any Catholic iconography.

Santería

Ocha-Ifá

- The *Regla de Ocha-Ifá* has an intricate ritual system that includes:
 - priestly hierarchies
 - holy places
 - private invocations
 - public celebrations
 - magical activities
 - rites of passage or transition
 - initiation and funerary events
- Liturgical behavior in Ocha-Ifá is very flexible, because despite the common body of coinciding essential guidelines, actual practices vary in detail from santero to santero.

Santería

Ocha-Ifá

- *Regla de Ocha-Ifá*, does not comprehend the dichotomy of God and the Devil.
- “Its gods are both good and bad depending on the moments and circumstances, just like human beings, and all of them can do favors and disfavours.” ¹
- In *Lucumí*, *Osain* is the deity of plants and he owns the magical and medicinal herbs.



Osain

1. Fernando Ortiz, 1975

Santería

Ocha-Ifá

- Practitioners are sometimes termed *curanderos* (healers) or *osainistas* (followers of *Osain*).
- *Santería* focuses on:
 - Healing skin complaints
 - Curing sexually transmitted infections
 - Resolving issues of female reproduction
 - Treating gastrointestinal issues
 - Treating respiratory problems,
 - Some practitioners occasionally provide concoctions to induce abortion.
- Supernatural factors cause or exacerbate ailments, so healers use divination to determine the cause of an ailment before prescribing treatment.

Santería

Ocha-Ifá

- An *Oricha* may make someone sick, either as punishment or to encourage them to make a change for good in their life.
- A spirit of the dead may attach itself to an individual and thus harm them.
- Humans can harm others through supernatural means:
 - Involuntarily, by giving them the *mal de ojo* (evil eye),
 - Deliberately, through *brujería* (witchcraft).
- Witchcraft is done out of envy, using cursing techniques from *Palo* and employing hair or nail clippings from the victim.

Santería

Mal de Ojo

- *Mal de ojo* is believed to be caused by the glances or the power of a stronger person acting on a weaker person, particularly a child.
- The child's mother fears that others will envy her good fortune in having a child and tries to protect the infant.

Santería

Mal de Ojo

- *Mal de ojo* occurs when someone stares at or admires a child, but does not touch it.
- The cause of the illness was said to be the *vista caliente* or *pesada* (hot or heavy stare) of the person admiring the child.
- 99% of children with *mal de ojo* are treated, usually by their mothers or grandmothers, but sometimes by other relatives or friends.

Santería

Mal de Ojo

- *Mal de ojo (evil eye)* is not fatal, but if not treated, or if treated incorrectly (i.e. by a physician), it may develop into *Mal de ojo pasado* (bad, spoiled) characterized by vomiting, severe coughing, and is often fatal.
- Prevalence of *mal de ojo* or its biomedical correlates are not known.

Santería

Mal de Ojo

- *Mal de ojo* indicates that a person has gotten closer than norms permit, and in the case of a child, the guilty party is usually from outside the family.
- Among the symptoms are severe headaches, high fever, fretfulness, and in the case of children, weeping.
- Part of the treatment is to find the person responsible, and if not possible, do one, or more, of the following cures.

Santería

Mal de Ojo

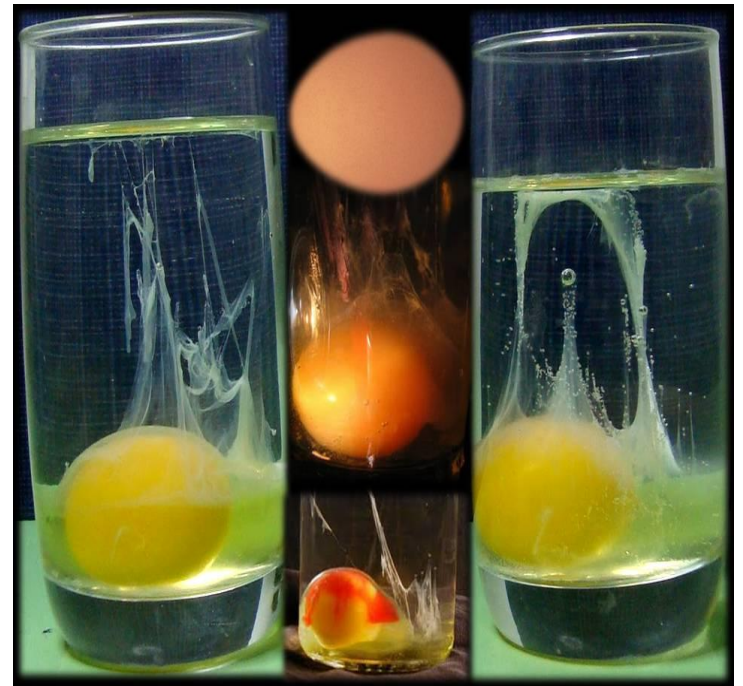
- The most common treatment was to *barrer con un blanquillo* (sweep with a white one).
- This involves rolling a raw room-temperature egg over the child's body, making crosses at large joints and praying out loud.
- Then the egg is cracked and placed in a glass of water that is put under the child's bed or on the headboard of the bed.



Santería

Mal de Ojo

- The next morning the egg is examined.
- If there are white circles or spots in the egg, it is certain that the child has *mal de ojo*; in severe cases, the yolk may be broken.
- The egg is then thrown out at dawn over the left shoulder of the mother "in the direction the sun rises."



Santería

Mal de Ojo (Adults)

- Persons suffer from heaviness or pressure on the chest when asleep or awake.
- Blood Pressure alterations evolve into nervous tension.
- Victims constantly feel depressed, with lack of energy.
- They can show confusion, decreased memory, impaired ability to concentrate, hallucinations, dizziness and headaches.

Verifying ⁽¹⁾



- Place some alcohol in a metal or clay dish.
- CAREFULLY ignite the alcohol.
- Grab some coarse salt, rub between palms and drop gently on the fire.
- If the salt crunches loudly as it burns, then the person has *mal de ojo*.

Verifying (2)

- Another way is by using a copper dish.
- Pour an ounce of white vinegar and several handfuls of coarse salt in it.
- Place this dish under the person's bed.
- If 3 days later, the salt has spilled over the edge of the dish, the person has *mal de ojo*.

Verifying (3)

- Take a glass of clean, fresh water and a few strands of the person's hair.
- Carefully place the hair on the surface of the water.
- Next, place 3 drops of olive oil in the glass of water, saying an Our Father for each drop.



Verifying ⁽²⁾

- Once this is done, one of 3 things might happen:
 - The oil sinks: the person has *mal de ojo*.
 - The oil floats in separate drops: possible but not certain.
 - The oil floats in a single drop: *no mal de ojo*.

Curing ⁽¹⁾

In front of a open window facing East:

- Take a deep white dish and fill with clean fresh water.
- Place a pair of scissors in the dish.
- Pour some intense olive oil in a small cup and stick person's left ring finger in the oil.
- Drip at least 7 drops of oil just where the scissors are under water.

Curing ⁽²⁾

- Recite the following formula: “ With one eye I have looked upon you, and with two I have bad-eyed you, but with oil I have cured you”.
- If the oil drops remain afloat, the remedy has been effective.
- If some or all of them sink, the remedy is working but must be repeated 3 more times for it to be fully effective.

Curing (3)

This ritual against *mal de ojo* and envy must be performed on a Friday night:

- In a deep white dish, pour fresh clean water, and then place 2 handfuls of *fine salt in the water*; stir to mix well.
- Place a white candle upright in the water, and then put the dish behind the door of the person's room who is suspected of having *mal de ojo*.
- The dish should remain there until the candle is consumed.
- The person will then be clean from the *mal de ojo*.

SUSTO

Santería

Susto

- Susto is mostly seen between 9 months to 1 year of age.
- Mothers with very sick, young children consult family members or traditional healers.
- Mothers believe that physicians cannot cure susto because they find the symptoms more difficult to diagnose and assign labels to.

Santería

Susto

- *Susto* affects both males and females.
- Symptoms include diarrhea, fever, vomiting, waking up frightened and crying in the night, lack of appetite or loss of weight.
- The most common cause for *susto* is that the child had been frightened, but a child could also develop *susto* if its mother had been frightened while she was pregnant.
- Babies are treated most commonly by the child's mother, a *sefiora* (an older woman who knows how to cure), or a *curandera* (folk healer).

Santería

Susto



Yerba buena



Artemisia ludoviciana

- The most common treatment is to sweep with herbs, such as *yerba buena* (spearmint) or *estafiate*, (*Artemisia ludoviciana*) over the child's body 3 times while saying prayers.
- Sometimes, an alum stone was burned, and the child was held over the smoke.
- An alternative treatment was to put scissors in the shape of a cross under the child's pillow.

Santería

Susto

- Other treatments include herb teas, sugared water or taking the child to a priest to be blessed.
- Mothers feel that treatment is necessary because if untreated, *susto* could lead to the child's death or the child could remain ill.
- People believe that physicians do not know how to treat or cure *susto*.

Susto

In adults

- Symptoms can gradually increase in a somewhat continued fashion.
- The most common clues are related to sleep:
 - Insomnia,
 - Nightmares,
 - Repetitive negative dreams
 - Startled arousals from sleep
 - Feelings of overwhelming burden

Poland

Herbs

HAITI

Haiti

Voodoo

- Arose in Haiti.
- Actual Religion.
- Has own rituals, leaders, teachers & services.
- Has a hierarchy of saints/lower gods with very specific powers and functions.

Haiti

Voodoo

- 2 distinct branches:
 - *Vodou* of New Orleans & Louisiana.
 - *Vodue* of Haiti.
- Believe in a Supreme Creator named ***Bondye***.
- ***Loa*** are spirits who work for ***Bondye*** and are responsible for various aspects of human life.

Haiti

Poland

- Polish Legions serving under Napoleon were sent to put down the Haitian Revolution in 1802.
- Polish soldiers sympathized with the rebelling slaves since they both were both fighting for their own independent state.
- Legionaries defected to the side of the former slaves and fought alongside them to eventually establish the world's first Black republic.

Haiti

Poland

- Following independence they took wives and passed on their surnames (e.g. Potenski) and fairer complexions.
- About 150 out of the 5K legionaries switched sides, while most of the rest died from yellow fever or in combat.
- The Haitian Constitution of 1805 bars all whitemen from ownership of property in Haiti with the exception of "naturalized Germans and Polanders, who are from thenceforth classified as Black".
- Many Poles to this day keep depictions of the Black Madonna in their homes, cars and wallets.

Haiti

Poland

- The Haitian *loa* Erzulie Dantor is a syncretization with the Black Madonna of Czestochowa.
- This is the loa of single mothers, homosexuals, justice and independence.
- Dantor was at a famous voodoo ritual in 1791, where she took over the body of a worshipper and urged Haitians to "kill the stranger" .
- The ensuing revolution culminated in the massacre of every Frenchman on the island and Haitian independence in 1804.

Haiti

- Leaf-doctoring, or herbal cures, are an integral part of many Haitians' health care regimens.
- Haitians rely on leaf-doctoring as essential to remedying their sicknesses and maintaining a state of good health.
- Haitians know that "modern medicine" exists and is practiced by doctors located a short distance away, but the old herbal beliefs don't die.
- These beliefs are woven in with Voodoo, serving the *loa* and reliance on the local *docteur feille* (leaf doctor).

Baby Wearing an Amulet



Red coral amulets or the black hand (mano nigra) protect babies against evil eye (*mal de ojo*), bad spirits and assault by negative forces.

Haiti

- Haitians have a highly developed instinctual sense of their bodies, particularly their circulatory system.
- The blood is watched by looking into the eyes, checking the fingernails, behind one's ears and through skin eruptions and bleeding.
- Haitians are concerned about the coloration, volume, quantity, purity, directionality and temperature of their blood and they feel nuances that are unheard of in the white folk medical literature.
- If they or their leaf doctor sense that any of these factors are out of balance in their body, they dose themselves with a decoction of sarsaparilla root.



Haiti

Quassia

- Other herbs are stimulating, like *quassia* (bitterwood).
- Named to honor Quassia, the Surinam slave and leaf healer who found that the bark and wood of the *Simarouba excelsa* plant were an excellent tonic and vermifuge.
- Slaves in America began treating themselves with *quassia*.



Haiti

Catnip



- A very common blood purifier is catnip or catmint, but more emphasis is given to its calming and sedative effects, especially on infants, than to its purifying.
- Catnip is a very mild herb and is safe to give to babies in tea form to clarify impurities in their blood, calm colic and can even stop convulsions.

Haiti

- There are many mint varieties such as peppermint, spearmint, lemonmint and horsemint, all of which soothe indigestion and decrease nausea.
- Mint teas are the first to be administered if someone complains of stomach upset in Haiti.

Haiti

Senna

- A tea of *senna* is given to expel worms, reduce biliousness (belching and indigestion), and as an all-purpose laxative .
- *Senna* is the main ingredient in many modern day American laxatives.
- In Haiti, where worms are a prevalent problem , *senna* is gathered and used for its vermifuge properties.



Haiti

- Women have always had to deal with menstrual cramps, excessive bleeding, water retention and unwanted pregnancy.
- Therefore, herbs are the medicine of choice and necessity for Haitian women.
- Red sage is an emenagogue herb which promotes menstrual flow .

Haiti

Quinine



- Quinine (*Cinchona calisaya*) derived from the bark of the tree is a chemical salt that can cause violent reactions.
- Used as an emmenagogue by women who are in labor, who call it *pains cutter* in rural Haiti.
- Another emmenagogue employed is vervain (*Verbena*) which is mild and gentle).
- It will increase menstrual flow much better than quinine for the purposes for which quinine is used (abortion?).

Haiti

Vervain

Common names

Verbena

Yerba de Santa Ana

Enchanter's plant

Juno's / Isis tears

Pigeon's grass (pigeonweed)

Herb of the cross

Used for

Lactation, dysmenorrhea

Jaundice, gout

Kidney stones, diuretic

Digestive tonic

Astringent, headache

Depression, anxiety, insomnia

Haiti

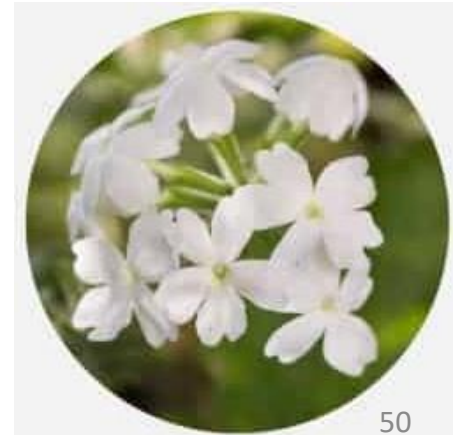
Vervain

- Anti-Inflammatory.
 - Anti-anxiety, relaxant.
 - **Aphrodisiac?**
 - Boosts gum health.
 - Antimicrobial and antibacterial.
- Cardioprotective.
 - **Emmenagogue.**
 - Fever.
 - Diuretic.
 - Headaches, insomnia.

Haiti

Vervain

- Vervain is *verbena* used for medicinal purposes:
 - *V. officinalis* (common verbena).
 - *V. hastata* (blue vervain).
 - *V. urticifolia* (white vervain).
- *Verbena officinalis* is a perennial plant with delicate, jagged leaves and small, five-petaled blossoms.



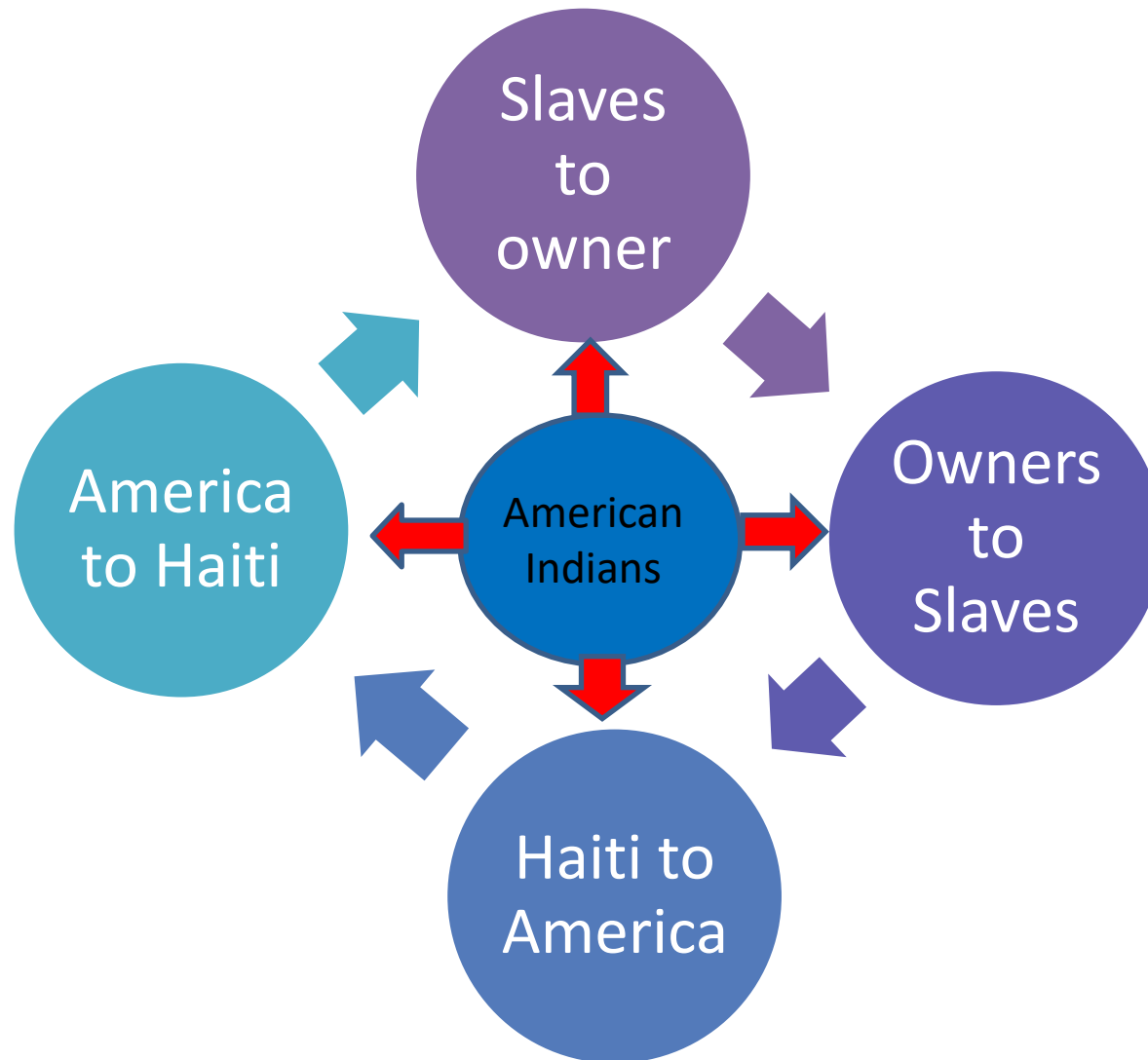
Haiti

- Douching with a decoction made from oak bark is used for general female hygiene and for curing excessive discharges.
- Ginseng and goldenseal, both with highly curative properties are not found in Haitian folk medicine.
- Climate is the main reason: Haiti is tropical and ginseng and goldenseal need cool, shady forest slopes to grow in.

Haiti

- Some slaves were able to bring a few plants along with their knowledge and their collective memories.
- Slaves exchanged their healing expertise in the plantation because of the dire need for staying alive.
- Knowledge, like slaves, was traded back and forth from slave to owner, owner to slave, Haiti to America and America to Haiti.
- If you throw in what the American Indians knew and imparted, you get a wide body of knowledge that serves a vital function.

Medical Knowledge Transference



FLORIDA NATIVE TRIBES

Seminoles

- The Seminole became a specific tribal entity in the 18th Century arising from several tribes, mainly Creeks from northern Florida, Georgia and Alabama.
- They had a thriving trade network during Florida's British and second Spanish periods (c. 1767–1821).
- They separated from the main Creek groups and joined survivors of Florida's ancient Native American tribes (Tequesta, Caloosa, Apalache, Yamasess, etc.) in the interior of south Florida.



Seminoles

- Developed alliances with African-American maroons, mostly self-emancipated former slaves from the South's Low Country and some free blacks from the Spanish period of rule.
- These people became known as Black Seminoles, establishing towns near Native American settlements.

Seminoles

- The term *Seminole* is a derivative of *cimarrón*, later modified as *simalóoni* (runaway).
- Then, it was adapted as *Seminolie* which means *wild fugitive men* in American Spanish.
- They were so named because of being Indians who escaped slavery in the British-controlled northern colonies.

Seminoles

- There are many "medicine" traditions regarding death, and numerous interpretations of those traditions.
- Some traditional burials leave the deceased's body on an open platform, surrounded by favorite possessions, exposed to the wilderness elements.
- All the family mourns for 4 days and on the 4th morning they will use herbs from the medicine, which they will drink with tea or wash with them.
- The widow will wear black and mourn for 4 months and must wait 4 years to remarry.

Seminoles

- Medicine men do not replace medical doctors, nor are their treatments designed to take the place of organized medicine.
- Usually elders or especially gifted young people who have gained the respect of Tribal members, employ roots, herbs, animal parts and other ingredients of nature to treat a variety of physical and mental disorders.

Semnoles

- Many believe that good luck, bad luck, success, failure, danger, safety, right decisions, wrong decisions, etc. can be influenced by the application of "medicine."
- Traditional chants and other customs private to the Tribe, can also be important parts of the medicine man's technique.
- Most details concerning the Seminole Indian medicine culture are not discussed outside the Tribe.

Seminole

- Medicines of the Seminole and Miccosukee healers consist of mixtures of plants and include many of the same varieties used by pioneers.
- A typical Seminole concoction might include portions of bay, willow, strangler fig, Carolina ash, red maple and slash pine.
- The medicine has to be prepared in a very specific manner and the patient would have to use it in a certain way.
- Often, experts gathered the plants and healers would then prepare them into medicine.

Seminoles

- Medicinal plants were sometimes mixed with substances like turpentine, moonshine whiskey, wood ash or even kerosene and given to the patient to drink.
- Some “cures” were simply superstitions and included practices like turning your shoes upside down before going to sleep (said to help with cramps) or tying a sack over a hand that had warts.
- The first person who removed the bag would get the warts and the patient would be cured!

Seminoles

- The bark of the willow tree contains salicin (element of aspirin) used as a pain reliever and vomit-inducing emetic.
- The passionflower is a sedative and calming agent.
- Button snakeroot yields a diuretic tincture that was used for blood disorders and fevers.

Seminoles

Herbal treatments include:

- Those intended for babies.
- For people who have had a hysterectomy.
- For sufferers of stroke.
- For victims of blackouts.
- Those ailing of shortness of breath.
- For “monkey sickness”.
- Alligator bites.

Seminoles

Other Herbal treatments:

- Those with a speeding heart.
- People who have chronic pain.
- People who have been ill for a long time.
- People who like to sleep all the time.
- People who can't sleep because of worry or bad dreams.
- People who are pregnant.
- People who are "on the wagon"
- People who have lost wives or husbands.

Seminoles

Ginseng

- A non-Florida plant, ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*), is a common ingredient in Seminole medicine.
- The roots are harvested in the autumn, preferably from plants 6 - 7 years old, and can be used fresh or dried.

Ginseng (Actions)

- Adaptogenic.
- Cardiotonic.
- carminative.
- Demulcent.
- Emetic.
- Expectorant.
- Improve health.
- Increase body vigor.
- Panacea.
- radioprotective.
- Sedative.
- Sialagogue.
- Stimulant.
- Stomachic.
- Tonic.
- To prolong life.

Ginseng (Uses)

- It is used in the treatment of:
 - chronic cough.
 - low-grade fever.
 - spontaneous or night sweating.
 - fatigue due to chronic consumptive disease.
- When taken over an extended period it is said to increase mental efficiency and physical performance while helping the body adapt to high or low temperatures and stress

Ginseng

Good effects

- Stimulates & relaxes CNS.
- Encourage hormone secretion
- Improves stamina.
- Lowers blood sugar.
- Lowers cholesterol levels,
- Increases disease resistance.
- Treats old age debility.
- Increases appetite.
- Resolves insomnia
- Helps Stress, Shock and Chronic Illness.

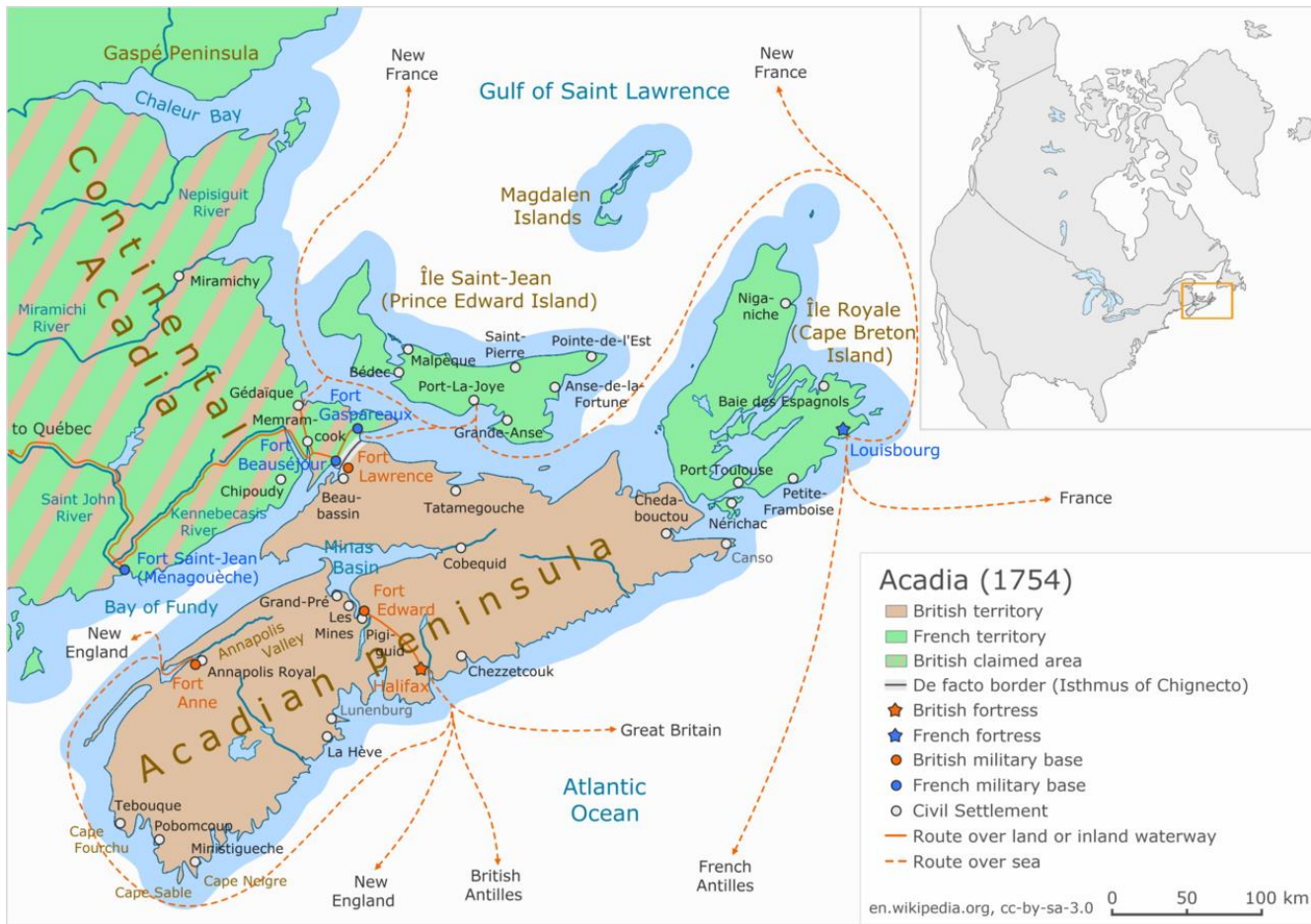
Side effects

- Headaches.
- Restlessness.
- Raised blood pressure.
- Tachycardia.
- Worse if taken with caffeine, alcohol, turnips and bitter or spicy foods.
- Don't use in pregnancy or patients <40.

Ginseng

The Seminoles call this herb “white medicine” and use it:

- To support sexual function.
- For treating coughs.
- As a general tonic.
- Topically for sores, arthritis, boils, painful eyes, earaches, and gunshot wounds.
- To stop vomiting.
- Increase appetite.
- For fevers and asthma.



ACADIANS

Acadia

- Regions of The Maritimes with Acadian roots, language, and culture, primarily in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, the Magdalen Islands, Prince Edward Island, and Maine.
- Influx of French to Southern Louisiana brought by Spain to prevent British access to Spanish silver mines in Mexico.

Cajun

Folk Medicine

Influenced by:

- French medical healing practices
- Spanish monastic medical beliefs
- American Indian wisdom
- African Slave herbal knowledge
- Voodoo and Santería traditions
- Interaction with Caribbean nations

Acadians

- The Acadians brought with them a European witchcraft tradition, which transitioned and transformed as a result of exposure to a Mi'kmaq cosmology.
- Conversely, the Mi'kmaq adopted European witchcraft beliefs into their shamanic traditions, whereby a *puwowin*, or shaman, adopted certain European attributes.
- Both the Acadian and Mi'kmaq cultures stressed the importance of interdependence.

Traiteurs

- *Traiteurs* (treaters) are the traditional folk medicine healers of south Louisiana: Cajuns, Creoles, Catholics and Native Americans who all participate in the healing rituals.
- There are many types of *traiteurs*;
 - Some use herbal remedies (*remèdes*).
 - Some use gestures such as the sign of the Cross.
 - Some use the laying on of hands.
 - Some use material objects such as a knotted string (*cordon*) which is tied around the affected area
 - Some specialize in 1 or 2 types of ailments.
- All of them use prayer, because faith in God's power to heal is the heart of this folk medicine.

Traiteurs

- Had good relationship with the *Mi'kmaq* Indians of the region and shared herbal knowledge.
- The number seven is significant in Acadian and *Mi'kmaq* cures.
- For example, the Acadian remedy *sept façons de bois*, which involves the gathering of 7 species of plants, utilizes *Mi'kmaq* ingredients.

Traiteurs

- One should not thank a *traiteur*, or the treatment would not work.
- But it would not work either if you did not give the *traiteur* a gift, whatever you had, but never money, because this was God's work.
- The *traiteurs'* services are not for sale, but not even the empty-handed will ever be refused treatment.

Traiteurs

- *Traiteurs* can treat a wide variety of ailments, including but by no means limited to warts, sunstroke, bleeding, arthritis, and asthma.
- Even if background is Catholic, Protestants or others are not denied access to treatments.

Traiteurs

- The gift of treating is usually passed from an older *traiteur* to a younger person, often in the same family.
- Sometimes the passing goes through an intermediary: mother, father, grandparent.
- The gift can be shared with another person but it may be diminished.

Traiteurs

The *traitements* of *traiteurs* may differ somewhat in detail, but they follow a distinct standard pattern:

- Treatment always begins with a request for help.
- The healer makes sure he knows the patient's full name.
- The patient explains his subjective experience of suffering to the treater, who may ask for clarifications.
- The treatment is performed 3 times; each round consists of silent prayer in French, and the laying on of hands.
- At the end, the treater says: In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and the Good Lord will do the rest.
- No “Amen” is said.

Traiteurs

- Prayers may vary, from the standard Catholic prayers, to secret memorized formulas that must be repeated verbatim as passed on.
- The sequence, style and location of the laying of the hands will differ depending on the *traiteur*.
- Energy flows back and forth from the hands of the healer to the body of the sufferer without any actual physical contact.

Traiteurs

- Some healers may heal by intercession, while others have the embodied power to heal.
- The traiteur is interested in the nature of the suffering, not the nature of the disease.
- They don't diagnose, they treat by trying to understand the patient's experience of illness.

Traiteurs

- They use the term asthma to refer to all breathing difficulties, without distinctions between bronchitis, emphysema, allergies, asthma or other causes of respiratory distress.
- Illness is not necessarily signified by pain, but rather by a disruption in social roles—one is not sick unless one cannot work.

Rainbow serpent

- Myths of a giant rainbow-serpent are common among primitive tribes inhabiting the tropics: Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti.
- *Ayida-Weddo* is a rainbow serpent *loa* of fertility in Haitian Vodou.
- *Oshunmare* is a male *and* female rainbow serpent in Yoruba mythology.
- The rainbow-serpent concept is connected with the occurrence and geographic distribution the *Boidae* family of snakes (boas, pythons)