

**Maisha Wester**

**"Voodoo Queens and Zombie Lords: Haiti in U.S. Horror Film"**

**ABSTRACT**

Since the success of its Revolution, Haiti has been consistently represented as the boogeyman in American nightmares. The nation's repeated ability to resist (re-)colonization and rebel against domination has frequently resulted in fictional and filmic representations of Haiti as a place which violently and horrifically disrupts (white) Western authority. And yet, such fictions are never really about Haiti and the supposed threat or "problem" she poses. Rather, they repeatedly represent and engage in debates about how the U.S. might control Haiti. Haiti-as-monster in these fictions becomes a metaphorical tool to mirror the monstrosity of the U.S. and its previous political maneuvers, a tool to support modern forms of intervention, and a tool which enables philosophical debate on U.S. national identity. In truth, Haiti disappears in the very first moment it appears on screen or in text. As such, this presentation will examine three different films at different moments of U.S. intervention into Haiti to examine how and why the texts make Haiti disappear: *White Zombie* (1932), *Zombies on Broadway* (1945), and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1986). Each film appears at a moment of shift in U.S. political engagement with Haiti. More importantly, each film presents terminology and ideology the functions in the U.S. socio-political discourse of its era.

**BIO**

Dr. Maisha Wester is an Associate Professor in American Studies, and African American and African Diaspora Studies at Indiana University. She is currently a Fulbright fellow doing research in the UK where she is investigating Black Gothic writing as well as the deployment of Gothic tropes in British discourses on racial and ethnic subjects. Her first book, *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (2012), interrogates Black appropriations, revisions, and critiques of Gothic tropes and discourses. As one reviewer remarks "Nowhere else can readers so clearly grasp in so many examples so well analyzed how African American authors have radically transformed specifically Gothic conventions to make them profoundly symbolic of the horrors and complexities of the black American experience." She is currently completing her second book *Voodoo Queens and Zombie Lords: Haiti in U.S. Horror Cinema* as well as a co-edited collection titled *Twenty-First Century Gothic*.