

**Buffett Undergraduate Research Fellowship Opportunity**

*The Kalunga Line: A Study of Revivalism, A Contemporary Afro-Christian Religion in Urban Jamaica*

**Faculty Mentor:** KB Dennis Meade, Assistant Professor, Religious Studies (Evanston campus)

**Project Synopsis:** The project centers the stories of members of Revivalism, an indigenous Afro-Christian religion practiced in urban communities in Jamaica. The project will entail interviews, site visits, and documenting the material archives of a prominent Revivalist in Kingston, Jamaica. The goal is to publish an article that accompanies a digital exhibition and short film.

The kalunga line is a Kongolesse religious principle that references water as a permeable boundary separating the living and the dead. It is an integral belief in Revivalism, an Afro-Christian religion in Jamaica-- a Caribbean nation that continues to navigate the demands of neoliberalism and underdevelopment in the wake of British colonialism and U.S. imperialism. The social fabric of Jamaicans' lives can be characterized as the ongoing negotiation of this legacy and the inherited antiblackness where religion and faith are concerned. Revivalists are maligned groups because of their adherence to African practices and ways of knowing, evident in the traditions ecstatic worship, and intentional use of magic in their rituals and music. Predominantly practiced by Jamaicans living within the inner city, the tradition sits at the nexus of Afrophobia (or fear of African derived practices) and the generative religious practices that make life meaningful for the country's most vulnerable. This documentary project seeks to foreground Revivalists voices, namely how their beliefs and practices enable to them to counter the challenges of urban life in Jamaica. Our investigation of Revivalism hinges on the following questions: How do Revivalists engage their faith practices to make meaning within the precarity of inner-city life? In what ways does Revivalists' reliance on Kongo-based beliefs enable them to develop an identity and social world in the context of an antiblack postcolonial society? And what are the implications of Revivalism for how we understand familial and community relationships regarding gender and sexuality? How do place and space function within the tradition and to what extent do Revivalists shape and are shaped by the lived environment? Our research engages the theme of the kalunga line as a cosmological reference and metaphor for the permeable boundaries that define the spiritual and social worlds to which Revivalists belong.

**Project Location:** Two weeks in Kingston Jamaica; 30 weeks Evanston, IL; Remote

**Ideal Applicant:** The undergraduate research assistant(s) (URAs) will function as part of a team of collaborators consisting of academics and film industry professionals.

- The URAs will assist in administrative duties related to community outreach, note-taking during team meetings, organizing confidential documents related to IRB approvals, and biographical information of research participants;

- The URAs will review auto-transcriptions of interviews for accuracy
- The URAs will be responsible for uploading and organizing images and videos to the project's database/cloud storage

For two weeks in the summer, the undergraduate research assistant(s), under the guidance and close mentorship of the project supervisor, will travel to Jamaica with audio-visual equipment to record in-person interviews and attend site visits to local Revivalist churches and sacred sites.

- The URA(s) will engage in library research and undergo training offered by NU Library on how to use Zotero (reference management software).
- The URA should be organized, detail-oriented, a self-starter, and have demonstrated interest in Black Atlantic/African diaspora history and culture and a passion for creative, impactful storytelling.

Due to the collaborative nature of this project, the URA will be invited to contribute their ideas and vision and should understand the importance of working in a supervised setting under faculty mentorship.

Requirements for International travel:

- The URA should already have or plan to acquire a valid non-expired passport prior to August 2024. No visa is required for travel to Jamaica if one is a permanent resident or U.S. citizen.
- URAs are responsible for being up-to-date on all vaccines recommended by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization.
- Mobility to walk on uneven pavement, steep walkways, comfort with being in high altitudes, and near bodies of water such as rivers and beaches.
- Able to carry 2-3 pounds of equipment for short distances.

**Number of Available Positions:** One