Hoodoo (spirituality)

Hoodoo is a set of spiritual practices, traditions, and beliefs created by African slaves in North America that were held in secret from slaveholders.[1] Hoodoo evolved from various traditional African religions and practices, and in the American South, incorporated various elements of indigenous botanical knowledge.[2] In the Gullah South Carolina Lowcountry Hoodoo is also known as "Lowcountry Voodoo."[3][4] Following the Great Migration of African-Americans, Hoodoo spread throughout the United States. Practitioners of Hoodoo are called rootworkers, conjure man or conjure woman, and Hoodoo doctors. Regional synonyms for hoodoo include conjure or rootwork.[5]

Hoodoo candle

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Origins

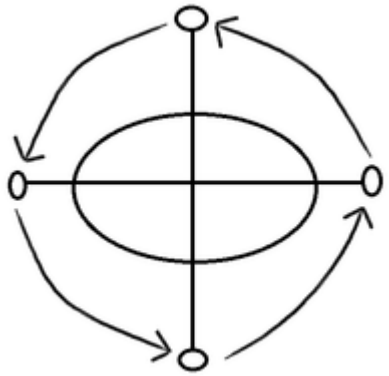
African slave trade

Background

Approximately 388,000 African people from various ethnic groups were shipped to British colonial North America and the West Indies between the 17th and 19th centuries as a result of the transatlantic slave trade.[6] They were Kongo, Igbo, Akan, Mandé, Yoruba, Fon, Ewe, and Fulbe, among many others.[7][8] After the arrival of diverse African ethnic groups to the United States, Hoodoo was created by enslaved African Americans for their spiritual survival as a form of resistance against slavery. "Because the African American community did not have the same medical or psychological aids as the European American society, its members were forced to rely on each other for survival. '...There was no justice in the courts for them and no regular source of financially reasonable medical aid from the white doctors in town. Therefore, blacks relied on hoodoo."[9] Also, "Hoodoo is defined as the spiritual and medicinal system of the African American in North America. This system originated on the plantation of the old South and is a reconstituting of several traditional African religious systems. Congo as well as Bambara influences are particularly observable." Diverse

African ethnic groups from West and Central Africa all worked on the same plantations. These diverse African ethnic groups in the United States overtime merged into one larger ethnic group called African-Americans who are the creators of Hoodoo. For example, the practice of the ring shout[10] in Hoodoo unified diverse African ethnic groups on slave plantations. "The Ring Shout enabled multiethnic Africans, in a particular locale, to combine in an inter-ethnic assimilation ritual that supported the nascent common identity of the African American. Enslaved Africans were ethnically a diverse group, had different national origins and did not participate in a single culture. The Ring Shout would challenge and dissolve that cultural and ethnic uniqueness."[11] Moreover, author Tony Kail (https://www.arcadiapublishing.com/Products/9781467137393), conducted research in African American communities in Memphis, Tennessee and traced the origins of Hoodoo practices to West and Central Africa. In Memphis, Kail conducted interviews with black rootworkers and wrote about African American Hoodoo practices and history in his book *A Secret History of Memphis Hoodoo*. For example, Kail recorded on slave plantations in the American south, "The beliefs and practices of African traditional religions survived the Middle Passage (the Transatlantic slave trade) and were preserved among the many rootworkers and healers throughout the South. Many of them served as healers, counselors and pharmacists to slaves enduring the hardships of slavery."[12]

Central African influence



Kongo Yowa Cosmogram

The Bantu-Kongo origins in Hoodoo are evident. According to academic research, about 40 percent of Africans shipped to the United States during the slave trade came from Central Africa's Kongo region. Emory University created an online database that shows the voyages of the trans-atlantic slave trade. This database shows many slave ships primarily leaving Central Africa (slave voyages (https://slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#timelapse)).[13][14] Ancient Kongolese spiritual beliefs and practices are present in Hoodoo such as the Kongo Cosmogram. The Kongo Cosmogram is a cross (+) sometimes enclosed in a circle. It represents the human life cycle of death and rebirth of the human soul, and the center of the cross is where the communication with spirits take place. The Kongo cosmogram symbolize the rising of the sun in the east and the setting of the sun in the west, and represents cosmic energies. The two lines in the Kongo Cosmogram is a boundary between the physical world and the spiritual world. "The basic form of this cosmogram is a simple cross with one line representing the boundary between the living world and that of the dead, and the other representing the path of power from below to above, as well as the vertical path across the boundary."[15][16] The Kongo Cosmogram cross symbol has a physical form in Hoodoo called the crossroads where Hoodoo rituals are performed to communicate with spirits, and to leave ritual items to banish negative energies.[17] The Kongo Cosmogram is also called the Bakongo Cosmogram and the "Yowa" cross. The Yowa (Kongo Cosmogram) is "A fork in the road (or even a forked branch) can allude to this crucially important symbol of passage and communication between worlds. The 'turn' in the path,' i.e., the crossroads, remains an indelible concept in the Kongo-Atlantic world, as the point of intersection between the ancestors and the living." Communication with the ancestors is a traditional practice in Hoodoo that was brought to the United States during the slave trade originating among Bantu-Kongo people.[18][19] In Savannah, Georgia in a historic African American church called the First African Baptist Church, the Kongo Cosmogram

symbol was found in the basement of the church. African Americans punctured holes in the basement floor of the church to make a diamond shaped Kongo Cosmogram for prayer and meditation. The church was also a stop on the Underground Railroad. The holes in the floor provided breathable air for escaped slaves hiding in the basement of the church.[20]


Slave dance and music

The Ring Shout in Hoodoo has its origins from the Kongo region with the Kongo Cosmogram and ring shouters dance in a counterclockwise direction that follows the pattern of the rising of the sun in the east and the setting of the sun in the west which the sun rises and sets in a counterclockwise direction. In addition, the ring shout "is a sacred circle, the center was a vortex of spiritual energy and power which represented a separate and sacred realm, one not of the material realities of enslavement. It represented a reality which connected one to the ancestors and reconfirmed a continuity through both time and space. Within the circle, the interaction between the individual and the community was mediated by sacred spiritual forces evidenced in spirit possession."[21][22][23][24] Through counterclockwise circle dancing, ring shouters built up spiritual energy that resulted in the communication with ancestral spirits. "As worshippers circled, some of them fell into the spiritual vortex of the circle's center where they were embraced by both the community and the supernatural spiritual forces. As a hallmark of African spiritual values in worship, the ring shout emerged early on in the slave community, and included both sacred dancing and spirit possession."[25] The ring shout tradition continues in Georgia with the McIntosh County Shouters.[26]

In 1998, in a historic house in Annapolis, Maryland called the Brice House archeologists unearthed Hoodoo artifacts inside the house that linked to Central Africa's Kongo people. "Materials excavated in Annapolis from the Brice and Carroll houses provide evidence of Kongo-like activities in eighteenth and nineteenth century urban settings. Archaeologists have interpreted such caches in terms of African American spiritual practices known as 'Hoodoo.' Descriptions of Hoodoo practices refer consistently to the use of doll parts, pins, pierced coins, and bottles, which functioned very much like power bundles from the Kongo region used to guarantee healing and protection or for pursuing wrongdoers. One set of materials has been interpreted as depicting a cosmogram (a Kongo sacred symbol) created and maintained over forty years. Scholars believe that the Brice House material created a sacred interior landscape rooted in a Kongo tradition." These artifacts are the continued practice of the Kongo's Minkisi and Nkisi culture in the United States brought over by enslaved Africans.[27]

Other artifacts uncovered at the James Brice House were Kongo Cosmogram engravings drawn as crossroads (an X) inside the house. "The Hoodoo artifacts make a crossroads that was intended to give its makers [enslaved African-Americans] active control over their own lives-including such applications as curing rheumatism, protecting children, assisting with finding a mate, and warding off a harsh mistress or master."[28] Nkisi bundles were found in other plantations in Virginia and Maryland. "The autobiographies of slaves and former slaves contain recollections of occult practices involving roots, coins, iron, fingernail clippings and other materials believed to have magical properties." The creation of Nkisi bundles by enslaved people were held in secret away from slaveholders for the purpose of protection, healing, or misfortune on slaveholders. Other items found that linked to West Central Africa, historians and archeologists suggests was the finding of quartz crystals which were used in some West African households to represent the ancestors. "Africans there often save white stones, which they associate with the spiritual world. They select quartz stones for the shrine to represent each dead ancestor. Dr. Lamp noted that such stones and many white objects, like buttons and ceramics, were well represented in the house artifacts. Lots of single elements of African rituals were practiced by slaves in this country and still are, he said. For example, the use of stones to represent spirits

In Hoodoo a crossroads is where two roads meet to form an X. The crossroads in Hoodoo originates from Central Africa's Kongo Cosmogram.

of ancestors. This is done today in parts of the South. I've seen glasses of stones in water maintained in homes."[29]

In Kings County in Brooklyn, New York at the Lott Farmstead Kongo related artifacts were found on the site. The Kongo related artifacts were a Kongo Cosmogram engraved onto ceramics and Nkisi bundles that had cemetery dirt and iron nails left by enslaved African Americans. The iron nails researchers suggests were used to prevent whippings from slaveholders. Also, the Kongo Cosmogram engravings were used as a crossroads for spiritual rituals by the enslaved African American population in Kings County. Historians suggests Lott Farmstead was a stop on the Underground Railroad for freedom seekers (runaway slaves). The Kongo Cosmogram artifacts were used as a form of spiritual protection against slavery and for enslaved peoples protection during their escape from slavery on the Underground Railroad.[30]

The word "goofer" in goofer dust has Kongo origins, it comes from the "Kongo word 'Kufwa' which means to die."[31] The mojo bag in Hoodoo has Bantu-Kongo origins. Mojo bags are called "toby" and the word toby derives from the Kongo word tobe. "Another important word in the lexicon of the charm makers is toby. A toby is a good-luck charm. In form and function it almost certainly derives from the tobe charms of Kongo. The original charm was 'made up of a mixture of earth and grave plus palm wine, and is believed to bring good luck." The mojo bag or conjure bag derived from the Bantu-Kongo minkisi. The Nkisi singular, and Minkisi plural, is when a spirit or spirits inhabit an object created by hand from an individual. These objects can be a bag (mojo bag or conjure bag) gourds, shells, and other containers. Various items are placed inside a bag to give it a particular spirit or job to do. Other examples of Kongo origins of the mojo bag is found in the story of Gullah Jack. Gullah Jack was an African from Angola who carried a conjure bag (mojo bag) onto a slave ship leaving Angola for the United States. In South Carolina, Gullah Jack used the spiritual knowledge he had with him from Angola and made conjure bags for other enslaved people for their spiritual protection.[32][33][34] Other Bantu-Kongo origins in Hoodoo is making a cross mark (Kongo Cosmogram) and stand on it and take an oath. This practice is done in Central Africa and in the United States in African American communities. The Kongo Cosmogram is also used as a powerful charm of protection when drawn on the ground, the solar emblems or circles at the end and the arrows are not drawn just the cross marks which looks like an X.[35][18]

Yale University professor, Dr. Robert Farris Thompson, has done academic research in Africa and in the United States and traced Hoodoo's (African American conjure) origins to Central Africa's Bantu-Kongo people in his book *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*. Thompson is an African Art historian and found through his study of African Art the origins of African Americans' spiritual practices to certain regions in Africa.[36] Academic historian Albert J. Raboteau in his book, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South,* traced the origins of Hoodoo (conjure, rootwork) practices in the United States to West and Central Africa. These origins developed a slave culture in the United States that was social, spiritual, and religious.[37]

West African influence

A West African gris-gris bag, the origin of the mojo bag (conjure bag) in Hoodoo

Another African origin in Hoodoo is the mojo bag. The mojo bag in Hoodoo has West and Central African origins. The word mojo comes from the West African word mojuba. Mojo bags are called gris-gris bag, toby, conjure bag, and mojo hand.[38] The West African Yoruba origins are evident in Hoodoo. For example, the Yoruba trickster deity called Eshu-Elegba resides at the crossroads, and the Yoruba people leave offerings for Eshu-Elegba at the crossroads. The crossroads has spiritual power in Hoodoo, and rituals are performed at the crossroads, and there is a spirit that resides at the crossroads to leave offerings for. However, the spirit that resides at the crossroads in Hoodoo is not named Eshu-Elegba because many of the African names of deities were lost during slavery; but the belief that a spirit resides at the crossroads and one should provide offerings to it originates from West Africa. Folklorist Newbell Niles Puckett, recorded a number of crossroads rituals in Hoodoo practiced among African-Americans in the South and explained its meaning. Puckett wrote..."Possibly this custom of sacrificing at the crossroads is due to the idea that spirits, like men, travel the highways and would be more likely to hit upon the offering at the crossroads than elsewhere."[39] In addition to leaving offerings and performing rituals at the crossroads, sometimes spiritual work or "spells" are left at the crossroads to remove unwanted energies.[40][41][42]

In Annapolis, Maryland archeologists uncovered evidence for West African and Central African practices. A Hoodoo spiritual bundle that contained nails, a stone axe and other items was found embedded four feet in the streets of Maryland near the capital. The axe inside the Hoodoo bundle showed a cultural link to the Yoruba people's deity Shango. "The bundle's most striking component, the stone axe, was especially intriguing. Dr. Lamp said this brought to mind the Yoruba and the Fon people of Benin, who considered the axe blade a symbol of Shango, their god of thunder and lightning. Matthew D. Cochran, a doctoral student in anthropology at University College London, who uncovered the bundle, said it would probably prove to be associated with Yoruba practices related to Shango." Shango was (and is) a feared Orisha in Yorubaland, because he is associated with lightening and thunder, and this fear and respect towards thunder and lightening survived in African American communities. Folklorist Puckett wrote..."and thunder denotes an angry creator." Puckett recorded a number of beliefs surrounding the fear and respect for thunder and lightening in the African American community. In Hoodoo objects struck by lightening hold great power. However, the name Shango and other African deity names were lost during slavery. Therefore, the name Shango does not exist in Hoodoo, but just the name the Thunder God. Also, enslaved and free blacks in New York were known among the whites in the area to take an oath to thunder and lightening. "Similar traditional African beliefs and practices were noted, especially in connection with resistance. In the 1712 uprising, for instance, enslaved men sought invincibility by covering their bodies with what they believed to be a special powder; they also confirmed their commitment to each other and the revolt by swearing a blood oath. And in the 1741 'conspiracy,' black men swore upon an oath of 'thunder and lightning.'"[43][44][45]

Hoodoo also has Vodun origins. For example, a primary ingredient used in goofer dust is snakeskins. Snakes (serpents) are revered in West African spiritual practices, because they represent divinity. The West African Vodun water spirit Mami Wata holds a snake in one hand. This reverence for snakes came to the United States during the slave trade, and in Hoodoo snakeskins are used in the preparation of conjure powders.[46] Puckett explained that the origin of snake reverence in Hoodoo originates from snake (serpent) honoring in West Africa's Vodun tradition.[47] Water spirits, called Simbi, are also revered in Hoodoo which comes from West African and Central African spiritual practices. When Africans were brought to the United States as slaves, they blended African spiritual beliefs with Christian

baptismal practices. Enslaved Africans prayed to the spirit of the water and not to the Christian god when they baptized church members.[48] "Baptism also had a distinctly African side to it. The nineteenth century Georgia practice of praying to Kongo-derived simbi spirits before immersion demonstrates this aspect of an other wise Christian rite."[49][50]


River baptism in New Bern

The West African Igbo origins are also evident in Hoodoo. Ambrose Madison was a slaveholder in British colonial America in the colony of Virginia, and was the grandfather of president James Madison. At Madison's plantation home (Mount Pleasant later Montpelier) in 1732 Ambrose Madison died from poisoning likely by his Igbo slaves. According to research from Douglass Chambers it was believed by Ambrose Madison's family that he was poisoned by three of his Igbo slaves. The evidence that Igbo slaves poisoned Madison is limited; however, the book does offer some information about Igbo people in Virginia. The Igbo people's spiritual practice is called Odinani that was brought to the United States during the transatlantic slave trade. Igbo people had their own herbal knowledge and spiritual practices that shaped Hoodoo in the United States. Communication with ancestors is an important practice in Hoodoo that originated from West and Central Africa. The Igbo people believe family members can reincarnate back into the family line. To ensure this process proper burial ceremonies are performed. Igbo people and other ethnic groups in West Africa have two burials for their family members one physical and one spiritual. Burial ceremonies of African Americans was influenced by the culture of Igbo people's belief in the care and respect for the dead and ancestors. If family members were not given a proper burial the soul suffered in the afterlife. "A proper burial ceremony opened the door to reincarnation; only the completion of all rites, Igbos believed, would send the spirit of the deceased to the spirit world. And only after having entered the spirit world could one reincarnate. A proper burial actually involved two burials, a physical one, in which the body was placed into the earth; and a spiritual one, a very public ritual that celebrated the individual's life while simultaneously mourning the loss. This second burial was just as important as the placing of the body in the ground because without it the spirit could not join the other ancestors or reincarnate."[51][52][53]

Archeologists in New York discovered continued West-Central African burial practices in a section of Lower Manhattan, New York City which is now the location of the African Burial Ground National Monument.[54] Archeologists and historians noted about 15,000 Africans were buried in a section of Lower Manhattan that was named the "Negroes Burial Ground." Over 500 artifacts were excavated showing continued African traditions in New York City's African American community. Some of the artifacts came from West Africa. At the site, only 419 Africans buried were exhumed, and from their discoveries archeologists and historians found African cultural retention in African Americans burial practices. For example, many of the Africans buried including women, men, and children had beads, waist beads, and wristlets. "In many African societies, beads hold ceremonial significance at every stage of life: at birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, and, finally, entry into the community of ancestors and spirits. For the living, they provide protection against evil, guard against bad fortune, and connote wealth, status, and fertility (when worn around the waist) of the wearer." Also, about 200 shells were found with African remains. "Shells also have significance in an African mortuary context, reflecting the belief that they 'enclose the soul's immortal presence." Also, beads, shells, and iron bars are associated with the Yoruba deity Olokun a spirit that owns the sea. After 1679, the majority of Africans imported to colonial New York were from West Africa. West Africans imported to the colony were Akan, Yoruba, Fon, and other ethnic groups. These diverse African ethnic groups brought their traditional cultures with them and adorned their dead with adornments made from American materials but had an African design and meaning to them. In addition, archeologists excavated conjure bags (mojo bags) at the site. For example, "African diviners and healers were among those enslaved and transported by force to the Caribbean and the Americas. They often carried pouches or bundles of special items that they used to communicate with the

A Ghana Sankofa Symbol was etched onto the memorial wall at the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York City.

spirits. Called conjuring bundles, such bundles contained items that were symbolic of important energies, essences, or deities. Items in bundles were made of things like claws, teeth, clay, ash, nut shells, bird skulls, feathers, or roots. Each of these items held a specific spiritual meaning. Healers and other enslaved Africans also kept charms on their persons for protection or good luck. Several of the people who were buried at the African Burial Ground were buried with items that could have been parts of conjuring bundles or charms." "Protective amulets hidden on the upper body were common among West Africans of the day." Other artifacts found at the site that linked to West Africa researchers suggests was the finding of an Akan Sankofa Symbol found on a coffin.[55] The Akan Sankofa Adinkra symbol means to remember ones ancestors, and look to the future while not forgetting the past.[56] In addition, West African spiritual beliefs mixed with the Christian faith, and free and enslaved West Africans started their own African Methodist Episcopal Zion Churches in New York.[57][58][59]

Haitian influence

Zora Neale Hurston, an African-American cultural anthropologist and Hoodoo initiate, reports in her essay, *Hoodoo in America,* that conjure had its highest development along the Gulf Coast, particularly in New Orleans and its surrounding rural areas. These regions were settled by Haitian immigrants at the time of the overthrow of the French rule in Haiti by Toussaint Louverture. Thirteen-hundred Haitians (of African descent, along with their White ex-masters) were driven out, and the nearest French refuge was the province of Louisiana. African Haitians brought with them their conjure rituals modified by European cultural influences, such as Catholicism. While some retained Haitian Vodou practices, others developed their own regional Hoodoo. Unlike the continental North American slaves, slaves in the Caribbean islands were encouraged to make themselves as much at home as possible in their bondage, and thus retained more of their West African customs and language.[60][61]

The Haitian Revolution and the conjure used during the revolution inspired other slave revolts in the United States. For example, in 1822 a free black named Denmark Vesey planned a slave revolt in Charleston, South Carolina that was modeled after the Haitian Revolution. "Denmark Vesey, a carpenter and formerly enslaved person, allegedly planned an enslaved insurrection to coincide with Bastille Day in Charleston, South Carolina in 1822. Vesey modeled his rebellion after the successful 1791 slave revolution in Haiti. His plans called for his followers to execute the white enslavers, liberate the city of Charleston, and then sail to Haiti before the white power structure could retaliate." Denmark Vesey's co-conspirator was an enslaved Gullah conjurer named Gullah Jack. Gullah Jack was known to carry a conjure bag with him at all times for his spiritual protection. For the slaves spiritual protection, Gullah Jack gave them rootwork instructions for a possible slave revolt planned by his co-conspirator Denmark Vesey. "He instructed his fellow rebels to keep crab claws with them and to only eat parched corn meal and a peanut butter-like mash before the rebellion. These measures were believed to protect against harm and capture through supernatural means." The plan was to free those enslaved through armed resistance and the use of conjure; however, Denmark Vesey and Gullah Jack were not successful because their plan was revealed and stopped.[62][63]

Botanical developments

James Hopkinsons plantation slaves planting sweet potatoes

African Americans had their own herbal knowledge that was brought from West and Central Africa to the Unites States. European slave traders selected certain West African ethnic groups for their knowledge of rice cultivation to be used in the United States on slave plantations. During the transatlantic slave trade a variety of African plants were brought from Africa to the United States for cultivation; they were, okra, sorghum, yam, benneseed (sesame), watermelon, black-eyed peas, and kola nuts.[64] "West African slaves brought not only herbal knowledge with them across the Atlantic; they also imported the actual seeds. Some wore necklaces of wild liquorice seeds as a protective amulet. Captains of slaving vessels used native roots to treat fevers that decimated their human cargo. The ships' hellish holds were lined with straw that held the seeds of African grasses and other plants that took root in New World soil."[65] African plants brought from Africa to North America were cultivated by enslaved African Americans for medicinal and spiritual use for the slave community, and cultivated for white American slaveholders for their economic gain. "African healers also felt a sacred connection to plants they found in the woods, and they used elements from African religious rituals when they prepared medicines."[65][66] African Americans mixed their knowledge of herbs from Africa with European and regional Native American herbal knowledge. In Hoodoo, African Americans used herbs in different ways. For example, when it came to the medicinal use of herbs, African Americans learned some medicinal knowledge of herbs from Native Americans; however, the spiritual use of herbs and the practice of Hoodoo (conjuring) remained African in origin.[67] Enslaved African Americans also used their African knowledge of herbs to poison their enslavers.[68]

During slavery, some enslaved African Americans served as community doctors for blacks and whites, despite many white Americans were cautious of black doctors because some enslaved Africans did poison their enslavers. Enslaved Africans found herbal cures for animal poisons and diseases that helped black and white Americans during slavery. For example, African traditional medicine proved beneficial during a smallpox outbreak in the colony of Boston, Massachusetts. An enslaved African named Onesimus was enslaved by Cotton Mather who was a minister in the colony. Boston was plagued by several smallpox outbreaks since the 1690s. Onesimus "introduced the practice of inoculation to colonial Boston" which helped reduce the spread of smallpox in the colony. "Little is known of Onesimus after he purchased his freedom, but in 1721 Cotton Mather used information he had learned five years earlier from his former slave to combat a devastating smallpox epidemic that was then sweeping Boston." Onesimus told Mather that when he was in Africa, Africans performed inoculations to reduce the spread of diseases in their societies.[69][70] "In the 1700s, an enslaved man named Caesar was given his freedom and one hundred pounds per annum for life by the General Assembly as a reward for discovering a cure for those who were bitten by a rattlesnake or who had swallowed poison. This knowledge was a two-edge sword, for blacks could use plant poison against their masters, and some did."[66]

Enslaved African Americans most often times treated their own medical problems themselves using the herbal knowledge they brought with them from Africa and some herbal knowledge learned from regional Native Americans. Many slaveholders were ignorant on how to treat their slaves medical conditions, and some slaveholders did not care for the health of their slaves just their labor. What made it more difficult for enslaved people were laws passed on the prevention for enslaved African Americans to provide medical care for themselves. Slaveholders passed preventative medical laws on their slaves because they feared enslaved people would poison them with their herbal knowledge. For example, "...elected officials in Virginia passed laws in 1748 designed to limit African Americans from administering

medical treatments but evidence suggests that plantation owners continued to tolerate and sometimes relied on slave herbal doctors following the passage of the law. Virginian lawmakers passed this law because of a concern for being poisoned by African American folk practitioners."[71] In addition, in 1749 in South Carolina the General Assembly passed a law "that prohibited slaves, under threat of death, from employment by physicians or apothecaries, expressly so that slaves could not concoct poisons or apothecaries, or administer medicines of any kind."[72] Slaveholders feared a possible slave revolt and being poisoned by their slaves, so much so that white Americans refused to provide enslaved African Americans medical knowledge. Any European medicines incorporated by African Americans came from African Americans curiosity, and not from slaveholders or other white Americans teaching enslaved African Americans herbal knowledge during slavery. Many of the medicines used by white Americans were chemical, while African Americans used the natural herbs and roots and made them into teas.[73]

Enslaved African American women used their knowledge of herbs to have miscarriages during pregnancy to prevent slaveholders from owning their children and to prevent their children being born into slavery. "More specifically, women's cooking and medical practices employed the use of West and West-Central African ingredients and herbs, carrying on ancestral traditions and differentiation of their cooking from those of enslavers provided women with a sense of empowerment. Women used herbs and roots medicinally, including to prevent pregnancies or induce miscarriages, thus denying slaveholders future offspring. Women, as well as men, used their knowledge of herbs and roots to treat their community both with and without slaveholder's knowledge or approval. Pierce Harper, enslaved in North Carolina, recalled medical practice on his plantation for many different ailments including intestinal distress, fever, and intestinal worms. 'Most of the time the master gave us castor oil when we were sick. Some old folks went in the woods for herbs and made medicine. They made tea out of 'lion's tongue' for the stomach and snake root is good for pains in the stomach, too. Horse mint break the fever. They had a vermifuge weed."[74] In addition, "Slaves used many of the plants used by the community of their white owners: snakeroot, mayapple, red pepper, boneset, pine needles, comfrey, and red oak bark, to name a few. Slave healers understood the various preparations of pokeweed and how to avoid its dangers while taking advantage of its curative properties. Sassafras root tea was a popular seasonal blood cleanser believed to 'search de blood' for what was wrong and go to work on it...Slave midwives would have known and used herbs for 'female complaints' and to ease childbirth. Slaves preferred their own doctors to white doctors and their 'heroic' purging and bloodletting."[65] Before and after the American Civil War, African Americans adjusted to their environments and learned the local flora from indigenous people, books, and their study of plants. [75] Europeans also brought their own plants from Europe to the United States for herbal cures in America which African Americans incorporated European herbs into their herbal practice.[76]

There were two kinds of Hoodoo herbalists. Some African Americans used herbs only for medicinal reasons to cure physical illness such as, headaches, heart problems, blood related diseases, and other illnesses. The second use of herbs practiced by African Americans were their spiritual use to remove curses, evil spirits, and bring good luck. "All of the hoodoo doctors have non-conjure cases. They prescribe folk medicine, 'roots', and are for this reason called 'two headed doctors'. Most of the prescriptions have to do with birth and social diseases. There is no formal training for this. Either men or women may take it up. Often they are not hoodoo doctors, but all hoodoo doctors also practice medicine."[77]

Traditional herbal healing remains a continued practice in the Gullah Geechee Nation. Gullah people gather roots from their backyards and gardens and make medicines to heal diseases and treat illnesses. "The natives of Hilton Head would plant peppermint,' 'It's the same thing then as now. They used it to settle the stomach.' And they would make peppermint oil for quick, temporary relief from toothaches, she said. Ravare reaches for a box of the plant mullein. A picture on the box shows exactly what she still sees growing on Hilton Head. 'It

was made into a tea, mostly for respiratory issues,' she said. Garlic was planted by the Gullah for use in regulating blood pressure and fighting infections, she said." Gullah people's herbal knowledge originated from African herbal practices. "These were things people had used forever and they knew they worked,' she said. 'Agriculture began in Africa. These people had skills. They were not just laborers. They came here knowing these remedies. They knew how to identify plants. The Indians did the same thing. Naturally, you use what you know." "We [Gullah people] used herbs and practices handed down from the elders."[78]

African American farmer in corn field, Alachua County, Florida in 1913

History

Antebellum era

Hoodoo developed as a primarily Central and West African retention with Native American and European influences such as regional indigenous traditional medicine and Judeo-Christian beliefs and folklore. The extent to which Hoodoo could be practiced varied by region and the temperament of the slave owners. For example, the Gullah people of the coastal Southeast experienced an isolation and relative freedom that allowed retention of various traditional West African cultural practices; whereas rootwork in the Mississippi Delta, where the concentration of enslaved African-Americans was dense, was practiced under a large cover of secrecy.[79][80]

Known hoodoo spells date back to the era of slavery in the United States. In the year 1712 in British Colonial America in New York, enslaved Africans revolted and set fire to buildings in the downtown area. The leader of the revolt was a free African conjurer named Peter the Doctor who made a magical powder for the slaves to be rubbed on the body and clothes for their protection and empowerment.[81] Conjure bags, also called mojo bags, were used as a form of resistance against slavery. William Webb helped enslaved people on a plantation in Kentucky resist their oppressors with the use of mojo bags. Webb told the slaves to gather some roots and put them in bags and "march around the cabins several times and point the bags toward the master's house every morning." After the slaves did what they were instructed by Webb, the slaveholder treated his slaves better.[82] Another enslaved African named Dinkie, known by the slaves as Dinkie King of Voodous, on a plantation in the American south, used goofer dust to resist a cruel overseer (a person who is an overseer of slaves). Dinkie was an enslaved man on a plantation who never worked like the other slaves. He was feared and respected by blacks and whites. Dinkie was known to carry a dried snakeskin, frog and lizard, and sprinkled goofer dust on himself and spoke to the spirit of the snake to wake up its spirit against the overseer.[83] Henry Clay Bruce who was a black abolitionist and writer, recorded his experience of enslaved people on a plantation in Virginia hired a conjurer to prevent slaveholders from selling them to plantations in the Deep South. Louis Hughes an enslaved man who lived on plantations in Tennessee and Mississippi, had a mojo bag with "roots, nuts, pins, and some other things," was carried to prevent slaveholders from whipping him. The mojo bag (conjure bag) Hughes carried on him was called a "voodoo bag," by the slaves in the area.[84] Former slave and abolitionist Henry Bibb wrote in his autobiography *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself* that he sought the help of several conjurers when he was enslaved. Bibb went to the conjurers (Hoodoo doctors) and hoped the charms provided to him from the conjure doctors would prevent slaveholders from whipping and beating him. The conjurers provided Bibb with conjure powders to sprinkle around the bed of the slaveholder, put conjure powders in the slaveholder's shoes, and carry a bitter root and other charms on him for his protection against slaveholders.[85]

Frederick Douglass, known abolitionist and author, wrote in his autobiography that he sought spiritual assistance from an enslaved conjurer named Sandy Jenkins. Sandy told Douglass to follow him into the woods and found a root which Sandy told Douglass to carry in his right pocket which would prevent any white man from whipping him. Douglass carried the root on his right side instructed by Sandy and hoped the root would work when he returned back to the plantation. The cruel slave-breaker Mr. Covey told Douglass to do some work, but as Mr. Covey approached Douglass, Douglass had the strength and courage to resist Mr. Covey and defeated him after they fought. Covey never bothered Douglass again. In his autobiography, Douglass believed the root given to him by Sandy prevented him from being whipped by Mr. Covey.[86] Hoodoo or conjure for African Americans is a form of resistance against white domination.[87][88] For example, "...other people [slaves] used conjuring to protect against the evils of slavery...Conjurers were perceived as a threat to white society as many enslaved persons went to them to receive potions or charms in protection or revenge against their masters."[89]


Paschal Beverly Randolph

During the era of slavery, occultist Paschal Beverly Randolph began studying the occult and traveled and learned spiritual practices in Africa and Europe. Randolph was a mixed race free black man who wrote several books on the occult. In addition, Randolph was an abolitionist and spoke out against the practice of slavery in the South. After the American Civil War, Randolph educated freedmen in schools for former slaves called Freedmen's Bureau Schools in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he studied Louisiana Voodoo and Hoodoo in African American communities, documenting his findings in his book, *Seership, The Magnetic Mirror*. In 1874, Randolph organized a spiritual organization called Brotherhood of Eulis in Tennessee.[90][91] Through his travels, Randolph documented the continued African traditions in Hoodoo practiced by African Americans in the South. In Hoodoo, "The practisers of the art, who are always native Africans, are called hoodoo men or women, and are held in great dread by the negroes, who apply to them for the cure of diseases, to obtain revenge for injuries, and to discover and punish their enemies." According to Randolph, the words Hoodoo and Voodoo are African dialects, and the practices of Hoodoo and Voodoo are similar to Obi (Obeah) in the Caribbean.[92][93]

Post-emancipation

The term "Hoodoo" was first documented in American English in 1875 as a noun (the practice of hoodoo) or as a transitive verb, as in "I hoodoo you," an action carried out by varying means. The hoodoo could be manifest in a healing potion, or in the exercise of a parapsychological power, or as the cause of harm which befalls the targeted victim.[94][95] In African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), Hoodoo is often used to refer to a paranormal consciousness or spiritual hypnosis, or a spell, but Hoodoo may also be used as an adjective in reference to a practitioner, such as "Hoodoo man." According to Paschal Berverly Randolph, the word Hoodoo is an African dialect.[96]

The mobility of Black people from the rural South to more urban areas in the North is characterized by the items used in Hoodoo. White pharmacists opened their shops in African American communities and began to offer items both asked for by their customers, as well as things they themselves felt would be of use.[97] Examples of the adoption of occultism and mysticism may be seen in the colored wax candles in glass jars that are often labeled for specific purposes such as "Fast Luck" or "Love Drawing." There were some African

Americans that sold Hoodoo products in the black community. "Mattie Sampson, a robust young Negro woman, told us that she does an active mail order business as representative of the Lucky Heart Company, the Sweet Georgia Brown Company, and the Curio Products Company. She supports herself comfortably by means of selling her credulous neighbors good luck perfumes, roots, lodestones, and similar charms. 'Duh chahms an good luck puhfumes an powduhs do deah wuk independent of any additional hep,' Mattie said. 'Ef anybody believe a puticuluh chahm is wut dey need, well, dat chahm will do duh wuk."[98] Since the opening of Botanicas, Hoodoo practitioners purchase their spiritual supplies of novena candles, incense, herbs, conjure oils and other items from spiritual shops that service practitioners of Vodou, Santeria, and other African Traditional Religions.[99]

Hoodoo spread throughout the United States as African-Americans left the delta during the Great Migration. As African Americans left the South during the Great Migration, they took the practice of Hoodoo to other black communities in the North. Benjamin Rucker, also known as Black Herman, provided Hoodoo services for African Americans in the North and the South when he traveled as a stage magician. In a book that has Black Herman as the author called the *Secrets of Magic, Mystery, and Legerdemain* "there are Hoodoo formulas, astrology, and dream interpretation." However Black Herman may have been the author. "Black Herman's origins lay in the South. He was born Benjamin Rucker in Virginia in 1892 and came of age in the shadow of an itinerant African American showman and street peddler by the name of Prince Herman (Alonzo Moore), who took in Rucker as an apprentice at the age of sixteen. By the time of Prince Herman's death, Rucker had fine-tuned his own skills at reading cards, divining fortunes, and cooking up healing elixirs, so much so that he was able to make his own way around the circuit of traveling faith healers who hustled material goods and spiritual assurances from town to town in Black Belt communities. Eventually the harbingers of poverty and racial discrimination pushed Rucker out of the South and toward Chicago, where in the late 1910s he launched an independent career, assuming a new biography and name borrowed from his old friend and mentor: henceforth he would be known as Black Herman."[100] For some African Americans that practiced rootwork, providing Hoodoo services in the black community for African Americans to obtain love, money, employment, and protection from the police was a way to help black people during the Jim Crow Era in the United States so blacks can gain employment to support their families, and for their protection against the law.[101][102]


Black Herman magician

The *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* is a grimoire that was made popular by European immigrants. Purportedly based on Jewish Kabbalah, it contains numerous signs, seals, and passages in Hebrew related to the prophet Moses' ability to work wonders. Though its authorship is attributed to Moses, the oldest manuscript dates to the mid-19th century. Its importance in hoodoo among some practitioners is summarized as follows:

> I read de "Seven Books of Moses" seven or eight yeah a'ready ... de foundation of hoodooism came from way back yondah de time dat Moses written de book "De Seven Book of Moses".[103][104]

However, the Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses is not traditional in Hoodoo. White Americans marketed Hoodoo to African Americans for their own personal profit which was not planned to maintain the African traditions in Hoodoo. The incorporation of European grimoires into Hoodoo began in the twentieth century during the Great Migration as African Americans left the South to live and work in Northern cities living near European immigrants. However, the Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses has become a part of modern Hoodoo, because African Americans connected to the story of Moses freeing the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, and Moses' magical powers against the Egyptians. Also, African Americans practiced Hoodoo centuries before the introduction of European grimoires. Hoodoo developed on slave plantations in the United States, and enslaved and free blacks used conjure as a form of resistance against slavery. Conjure practices in the slave community and among free blacks remained Central and West African in origin which Hoodoo practices included the ring shout, dream divination, Bible conjure, spiritual use of herbs, conjure powders, conjure bags (mojo bags), and drawing Kongo Cosmogram engravings (an X) on floors to protect themselves from a harsh slaveholder.[105][106] For example, Gullah Jack was an African from Angola who brought a conjure bag onto a slave vessel leaving Angola going to the United States for his spiritual protection against slavery.[107] "Blacks utilized conjure as a form of resistance, revenge, and self-dense."[108] After the American Civil War into the present day with the Black Lives Matter Movement, Hoodoo practices in the African American community also focus on spiritual protection from police brutality.[109][110]

Today, Hoodoo and other forms of African Traditional Religions are present in the Black Lives Matter movement as one of many methods against police brutality and racism in the black community. For example, in a news article from California State University..."the Black Lives Matter movement, a movement that is generally deemed as non-religious, is actually deeply rooted in spirituality and has brought spiritual healing to the Black community and continues to share and spread this information to non-Black communities." "We are carrying out a rich tradition of Black organizing that is dynamic, spirit based and gives honor to what we are doing... We are giving honor to the spiritualism and the activism that our ancestors did and relied upon." Black American keynote speakers that are practitioners of Hoodoo spoke at an event at The Department of Arts and Humanities at California State University about the importance of Hoodoo and other African spiritual traditions practiced in social justice movements to liberate black people from oppression.[111]

Protesters with signs in Ferguson

Divination

The use of divination in Hoodoo originated from African practices. In West and Central Africa, divination was (and is) used to determine what measures an individual or a community should know that is important for survival and spiritual balance. "Throughout Africa - whether in the city or in the country, no matter the religion, sex, or status of the individual - questions, problems, and choices arise for which everyday knowledge is insufficient and yet action must be taken. The information necessary to respond effectively is available, but often only through a diviner. This is why divination continues to provide a trusted means of decision making, a basic source of vital knowledge."[112] There are several forms of divination traditionally used in Hoodoo.[113]

Cleromancy

Involves the casting of small objects (such as shells, bones, stalks, coins, nuts, stones, dice, sticks, etc.) The use of bones, sticks, shells and other items is a form of divination used in Africa and in Hoodoo in the United States.[114]


A bone reading

Cartomancy

Divination by means of interpreting cards. The use of divining with cards was added later in Hoodoo, such as Tarot and poker playing cards. There are some Hoodoo practitioners that use both.[115]

Natural or Judicial Astrology

The study of positions and motions of celestial bodies in the belief that they have an influence over nature and human affairs.[116]

Augury

The deciphering of phenomena (omens) that are believed to foretell the future, often signifying the advent of change.[117]

Oneiromancy

A form of divination based upon dreams.[118]

In the history of Hoodoo, Aunt Caroline Dye (https://www.arkansasstateparks.com/articles/hoo-doo-woman-arkansas) was a Hoodoo woman born enslaved in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and moved to Arkansas in her adult life. Aunt Caroline Dye was known for her psychic abilities, and used a deck of cards and provided spiritual readings for blacks and whites.[119] "Caroline's exceptional abilities started as a young child. When she was 10 years old and still a slave on the plantation, she was helping to set the table for Thanksgiving Dinner. She started insisting that they had not set enough plates, that Mister Charley was coming. Charley was the Plantation owner's brother, who was thought to have been killed four years earlier in the Civil War. Sure enough, later that day Charley came walking in the door. The family couldn't believe it! He relayed the fact that he had been wounded, taken prisoner, and had not had the chance to come home until that day. No one ever knew how she could have guessed such a thing, and all her little coincidences really started to be noticed after that. White and colored would go to her. You sick in bed, she raise the sick. ... Had that much brains — smart lady. ... That's the kind of woman she was. Aunt Caroline Dye, she was the worst woman in the world. Had that much sense." Aunt Caroline Dye's psychic abilities were so well-known that several Blues songs were written about her by African American Blues musicians.[120]

Hoodoo and the Spiritual Church Movement

The Spiritual Church Movement in the United States began in the mid-nineteenth century. The African American community was a part of this movement beginning in the early twentieth century, and several spiritual churches were in African American communities. Some African Americans started independent spiritual churches as a way for them to hide their African practices from whites by synchronizing African traditions with the Christian faith. Some Black spiritual churches incorporated some elements of Hoodoo and Voodoo practices. "Not all spiritualistic congregations practice hoodoo. The original Spiritualist church in New Orleans is apparently free of hoodoo. This congregation was established in 1918 by Mother Leafy Anderson and called the Eternal Life Spiritualist Church. Subsequently eleven other spiritualists grew up in the city, more or less affiliated with Mother Anderson's. A strong aroma of hoodoo clings about the other eleven congregations but 'The Eternal Life' practices no hoodoo. Mother Leafy Anderson was not a hoodoo doctor in the phrase of her church members. Eleven of her congregations were 'stolen' by hoodoo worshippers." There were some spiritual churches documented by Zora Neale Hurston that incorporated Hoodoo practices. "Mother Hyde combines conjure and spiritualism. She burns candles as do the Catholics, sells the spirit oil, but gives a 'cake' to be used with the oil. This bit of cake, saturated with spirit oil, is enclosed in a salve box with 'God be with us' written on the top. Mother Hyde told me, 'In case of trouble, arise at dawn and face the east. Take the vial of spirit oil in one hand and the cake (in its box) in the other. Read the Twenty-Third Psalm and let that be your prayer. When you come to the part, 'Thou anointest my head with oil,' shake the bottle well and pour three drops on your head and anoint your head. Do this every time you want to conquer and accomplish." African American spiritual churches provided food and other services for the black community.[121][122][123]

Universal Hagar Spiritual Church

Practices

"Seeking" process


Coffin Point Praise House

In a process known as "seeking" a Hoodoo practitioner will ask for salvation of a person's soul in order for a Gullah church to accept them. A spiritual leader will assist in the process and after believing the follower is ready they will announce it to the church. A ceremony will commence with much singing, and the practice of a ring shout.[4] The word "shout" derived from the West African Muslim word saut, meaning "dancing or moving around the Kaaba." The ring shout in Black churches (African American churches) originates from African styles of dance. "Despite the African style of singing, the spirituals, like the 'running spirituals' or rings shout, were performed in praise of the Christian God. The names and words of the African gods were replaced by Biblical figures and Christian imagery."[124] During slavery enslaved Africans were forced to become Christian which resulted in a blend of African and Christian spiritual practices that shaped hoodoo. As a result, hoodoo was and continues to be practiced in some Black churches in the United States.[125][126] In the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage

Corridor[127] area, praise houses[128] are places where African Americans gather to have church and perform healing rituals and the ring shout. "For example, since the mid-nineteenth century, travelers and northern teachers among the Gullah/Geechees have described an African-looking ritual called the 'ring shout.' Following the normal church, or 'praise house,' service, fully ordained members of the praise house often engaged in an accelerating circular dance, accompanied by singing and clapping. The ring shout culminated in the ecstatic descent of the Holy Spirit."[129] The ring shout in hoodoo has its origins in the Kongo region of Africa with the Kongo Cosmogram. For example, "Ring Shouts begin with an ancient ceremony which follows the circular pattern of the (Ba)Kongo Cosmogram. The Cosmogram symbol depicts the pattern of energy flow connecting the spiritual and physical worlds. During a Ring Shout, the counter-clockwise motion is meant to invoke the spirit while participants sing, pray and chant. Participants never lift their feet from the earth as they travel the Ring." "A Ring Shout is a ritual with spiritual healing qualities as prominent as transcendental vision quests, astral projection, or nirvana. 'In order for a Ring Shout to occur, the participants must step aside from their cerebral presence and allow Spirit to enter and govern the Ring."[130][131] The Kongo Cosmogram sun cycle also influenced how African Americans in Georgia prayed. "According to Sophie the old people on St. Catherines would pray at the rising and at the setting of the sun and at the conclusion of their prayers they would say the words 'Meena, Mina, Mo.' Asked if she knew the meaning of these words, she shook her head negatively."[132]

The ring shout continues today in Georgia with the McIntosh County Shouters (https://folkways.si.edu/jubilee-by-the-mcintosh-county-shouters/music/video/smithsonian).[133]

Hoodoo Initiations

This seeking process in Hoodoo accompanied with the ring shout is also an initiation into Hoodoo. For example, "Both during and after slavery, people of the sea islands [Gullah People] took part in spiritual initiation process as young adults. Scholars attribute this initiation practice as one that combined West African community-based initiation practices with what Methodist preachers called 'seeking Jesus.' It resulted in the young person joining the Christian community and required several phases. Seekers required spiritual guidance most often provided by spiritual mothers, time in the 'wilderness' of the Lowcountry (often using a forest or open field), and finally, approval from the community's Black religious leaders."[134][135] Zora Neale Hurston wrote about her initiation into Hoodoo in her book Mules and Men published in 1935. Hurston explained her initiation into Hoodoo included wrapped snakeskins around her body, and lying on a bed for three days nude so she could have a vision and acceptance from the spirits. Hurston wrote..."With the help of other members of the college of hoodoo doctors called together to initiate me, the snake skins I had brought were made into garments for me to wear...I was made ready and at three o'clock in the afternoon, naked as I came into the world, I was stretched, face downwards, my navel to the snake skin cover, and began my three day search for the spirit that he might accept me or reject me according to his will. Three days my body must lie silent and fasting while my spirit went wherever spirits must go that seek answers never given to men as men."[136] In addition to lying on a bed nude wrapped in snakeskins for her initiation, Hurston also had to drink the blood of the Hoodoo doctors who initiated her from a wine glass cup.[137] "Apprenticing herself to Luke Turner, a hoodoo doctor who claims he is the nephew of Marie Laveau, Hurston completely undergoes all the rites and initiation ceremonies required of her: she drinks blood, lies nude on a snakeskin for three days, and experiences visions: 'For sixty- nine hours I lay there. I had five psychic experiences and awoke at last with no feeling of hunger, only one of exaltation.'"[138]

Spirit mediation

The purpose of Hoodoo was to allow people access to supernatural forces to improve their lives. Hoodoo is purported to help people attain power or success ("luck") in many areas of life including money, love, health, and employment. As in many other spiritual and medical folk practices, extensive use is made of herbs, minerals, parts of animals' bodies, an individual's possessions.

Contact with ancestors or other spirits of the dead is an important practice within the conjure tradition, and the recitation of psalms from the Bible is also considered spiritually influential in Hoodoo. Due to Hoodoo's great emphasis on an individual's spiritual power to effect desired change in the course of events, Hoodoo's principles are believed to be accessible for use by any individual of faith.[139] Hoodoo practice does not require a formally designated minister.

Bottle tree

Hoodoo is linked to a popular tradition of bottle trees in the United States. According to gardener and glass bottle researcher Felder Rushing, the use of bottle trees came to the Old South from Africa with the slave trade. The use of blue bottles is linked to the "haint blue" spirit specifically. Glass bottle trees have become a popular garden decoration throughout the South and Southwest.[140] According to academic research, the origins of bottle trees practiced by African Americans has its origins from the Kongo region. "It is, however, in the United States that most Kongo-derived bottle trees are to be found...In Mississippi these trees, shorn of life, bearing cold, glittering bottles - visuals statements, again, of death and arrest of the spirit - simply block or ward off evil. The custom compares with that in Texas, where 'grave glass will keep the 'evil spirits away' or 'keep away the man's spirit." The purpose of bottle trees is to protect a home or a location from evil spirits by trapping evil spirits inside the bottles.[141]

A bottle tree

Cosmology

God

Since the 19th century there has been Christian influence in Hoodoo thought.[142] This is particularly evident in relation to God's providence and his role in retributive justice. For example, though there are strong ideas of good versus evil, cursing someone to cause their death might not be considered a malignant act. One practitioner explained it as follows:

"In hoodooism, anythin' da' chew do is de plan of God undastan', God have somepin to do wit evah' thin' you do if it's good or bad, He's got somepin to do wit it ... jis what's fo' you, you'll git it."[143] A translation of this is, "In hoodooism, anything that you do is the plan of God, understand? God has something to do with everything that you do whether it's good or bad, he's got something to do with it... You'll get

what's coming to you."

According to Carolyn Morrow Long, "At the time of the slave trade, the traditional nature-centered religions of West and Central Africa were characterized by the concept that human well-being is governed by spiritual balance, by devotion to a supreme creator and a pantheon of lesser deities, by veneration and propitiation of the ancestors, and by the use of charms to embody spiritual power. ...In traditional West African thought, the goal of all human endeavor was to achieve balance." Several African spiritual traditions recognized a genderless supreme being who created the world, was neither good nor evil, and which did not concern itself with the affairs of mankind. Lesser spirits were invoked to gain aid for humanity's problems.[144][145]

God as conjurer


Some rootworkers use Christian imagery on their Hoodoo altars

Not only is Yahweh's providence a factor in Hoodoo practice, but Hoodoo thought understands the deity as the archetypal Hoodoo doctor. On this matter Zora Neale Hurston stated, "The way we tell it, Hoodoo started way back there before everything. Six days of magic spells and mighty words and the world with its elements above and below was made."[146] From this perspective, biblical figures are often recast as Hoodoo doctors and the Bible becomes a source of spells and is, itself, used as a protective talisman.[147] This can be understood as a syncretic adaptation for the religion. By blending the ideas laid out by the Christian Bible, the faith is made more acceptable. This combines the teachings of Christianity that Africans brought to America were given and the traditional beliefs they brought with them.

A recent work on hoodoo lays out a model of hoodoo origins and development. *Mojo Workin: The Old African American Hoodoo System* by Katrina Hazzard-Donald discusses what the author calls

> the ARC or African Religion Complex which was a collection of eight traits which all the enslaved Africans had in common and were somewhat familiar to all held in the agricultural slave labor camps known as plantations communities. Those traits included naturopathic medicine, ancestor reverence, counter clockwise sacred circle dancing, blood sacrifice, divination, supernatural source of malady, water immersion and spirit possession. These traits allowed Culturally diverse Africans to find common culturo-spiritual ground. According to the author, hoodoo developed under the influence of that complex, the African divinities moved back into their natural forces, unlike in the Caribbean and Latin America where the divinities moved into Catholic saints.

This work also discusses the misunderstood "High John the Conqueror root"[148] and myth as well as the incorrectly-discussed "nature sack".[149]

Moses as conjurer

Hoodoo practitioners often understand the biblical figure Moses in similar terms. Hurston developed this idea in her novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, in which she calls Moses, "the finest Hoodoo man in the world."[150] Obvious parallels between Moses and intentional paranormal influence (such as magic) occur in the biblical accounts of his confrontation with Pharaoh. Moses conjures, or performs magic "miracles" such as turning his staff into a snake. However, his greatest feat of conjure was using his powers to help free the Hebrews from slavery. This emphasis on Moses-as-conjurer led to the introduction of the pseudonymous work the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* into the corpus of hoodoo reference literature.[151]

Bible as talisman

Gutenberg Bible, Lenox Copy, New York Public Library, 2009. Pic 01

In Hoodoo, "All hold that the Bible is the great conjure book in the world."[152] It has many functions for the practitioner, not the least of which is a source of spells. This is particularly evident given the importance of the book *Secrets of the Psalms* in hoodoo culture.[153] This book provides instruction for using psalms for things such as safe travel, headache, and marital relations. The Bible, however, is not just a source of spiritual works but is itself a conjuring talisman. It can be taken "to the crossroads", carried for protection, or even left open at specific pages while facing specific directions. This informant provides an example of both uses:

> Whenevah ah'm afraid of someone doin' me harm ah read the 37 Psalms an' co'se ah leaves the Bible open with the head of it turned to the east as many as three days.[154]

Author, Theophus Harold Smith, explained in his book, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations in Black America,* that the Bible's place is an important tool in Hoodoo for African Americans' spiritual and physical liberation. For example, "Smith shows that the Bible, the sacred text of Western civilization, has in fact functioned as a magical formulary for African Americans. Going back to slave religion, and continuing in black folk practice and literature to the present day, the Bible has provided African Americans with ritual prescriptions for prophetically re-envisioning, and thereby transforming, their history and culture. In effect the Bible is a 'conjure book' for prescribing cures and curses, and for invoking extraordinary and Divine powers to effect changes in the conditions of human existence--and to bring about justice and freedom."[155]

For example, enslaved and free blacks used the Bible as tool against slavery. Enslaved and free blacks that could read found the stories of the Hebrews in the Bible in Egypt similar to their situation in the United States as enslaved people. The Hebrews in the Old Testament were freed from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Examples of enslaved and free blacks using the Bible as a tool for liberation were Denmark Vesey's slave revolt in South Carolina in 1822 and Nat Turner's insurrection in Virginia in 1831. Vesey and Turner were ministers, and utilized the Christian faith to galvanize enslaved people to resist slavery through armed resistance. In Denmark Vesey's slave revolt, Vesey's co-conspirator was an enslaved Gullah conjurer named Gullah Jack who gave the slaves rootwork instructions for their

spiritual protection for a possible slave revolt. Gullah Jack and Denmark Vesey attended the same church in Charleston, South Carolina and that was how they knew each other. However, Nat Turner was known among the slaves to have dreams and visions that came true. In the Hoodoo tradition, dreams and visions comes from spirits, such as the ancestors or the Holy Spirit in the Christian faith. Relying on dreams and visions as inspiration and knowledge is an African practice blended with the Christian faith among enslaved and free African Americans. After Nat Turner's rebellion, laws were passed in Virginia to end the education of free and enslaved blacks, and only allow white ministers to be present at all church services for enslaved people. White ministers preached obedience to slavery, while enslaved and free black ministers preached resistance to slavery using the stories of the Hebrews and Moses in the Old Testament of the Bible. There was a blend of African spiritual practices in both slave revolts of Vesey and Turner. Vesey and Turner used the Bible, and conjure was used along side the Bible.[156]

Spirits

A spirit that torments the living is known as a Boo Hag.[4] Spirits can also be conjured to cure or kill people, and predict the future.[157] Also wearing a silver dime worn around the ankle or neck can protect someone from evil spirits and conjure.[158] Communication with spirits and the dead (ancestors) is a continued practice in Hoodoo that originated from West and Central Africa. Nature spirits in Hoodoo called Simbi originates from West-Central Africa, and Simbi spirits are associated with water and magic in Africa and in Hoodoo.[159] Simbi singular, and Bisimbi plural, are African water spirits. This belief in water spirits was brought to the United States during the transatlantic slave trade and continues in the African American community in the practice of Hoodoo and Voodoo. The Bisimbi are water spirits that reside in gullies, streams, fresh water, and outdoor water features (fountains).[160] Academic research on the Pooshee Plantation (https://south-carolina-plantations.com/berkeley/pooshee.html) and Woodboo Plantation (https://south-carolina-plantations.com/berkeley/woodboo.html) in South Carolina, showed a continued belief of African water spirits among enslaved African Americans. Both plantations are "now under the waters of Lake Moultrie".[161]

The earliest known record of simbi spirits was recorded in the nineteenth century by Edmund Ruffin who was a wealthy slaveholder from Virginia, and traveled to South Carolina "to keep the slave economic system viable through agricultural reform". In Ruffin's records he spelled simbi, cymbee, because he did not know the original spelling of the word. "At Pooshee plantation on the Santee Canal not too far from Woodboo, Ruffin stated that a young slave boy went to a fountain for water late at night and was very frightened by a cymbee [Simbi water spirit] who was running around and around the fountain. Although few witnesses to the appearance of cymbees were found by Ruffin, he stated that they are generally believed by the slaves to be frequent and numerous. Part of the superstition was that it was bad luck for anyone who saw one to 'tell of the occurrence, or refer to it; and that his death would be the certain penalty, if he told of the meeting for some weeks afterwards." Another occurrence from an enslaved man said simbi spirits have long hair. "A slave driver that accompanied Ruffin told him that he had never seen the Woodboo cymbee, but that others had told him that it was web footed like a goose. Another elderly slave stated that, as a very young boy he had seen one at another fountain. Ruffin wrote that the man said the cymbee was 'seated on a plank which was laid across the water, & that the long brown hair of her head hung down so low, & so covered her face & whole body & limbs, that he saw no other feature; nor could he answer to my question whether she was a white or a negro cymbee, except as may be inferred from her long hair.' After seeing her, she glided into the water and disappeared. The man admitted that he was 'so young and so frightened, that his recollection of what he saw was rather vague." In Central Africa's Kongo region, "...bisimbi inhabit rocks, gullies, streams, and pools, and are able to influence the fertility and well being of those living in the area". "What are bisimbi? They have other

West African water-spirit figure (MIA)

names, too. Some are called python, lightning gourd or calabash, mortar or a sort of pot. The explanation of their names is that they are water spirits (nkisi mia mamba). The names of some of these minkisi are: Na Kongo, Ma Nzanza, Nkondi and Londa. There is a significant amount of Kongo culture that continues today in the African American community, because 40 percentage of Africans taken during the transatlantic slave trade (https://slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#timelapse) came from Central Africa's Congo Basin.[162][163]

Other spirits revered in Hoodoo are the ancestors. In Hoodoo, the ancestors are important spirits that intercede in people's lives. "The Gullah people believe the spirit of their ancestors participates in their daily affairs and protects and guides them using spiritual forces." Also, it is believed one's soul returns to God after death, however their spirit may still remain on Earth. Spirits can interact with the world by providing good fortune or bringing bad deeds. Among the Gullah Geechee, "...the Gullah descendants continue to lead a spiritual life that influences every aspect of their lives. They believe in the dual nature of the soul and spirit. In death, one's soul returns to God but the spirit remains on earth to live among the individual's descendants. It is common for funerals to be ornate and for mourners to decorate graves using items that belonged to the newly deceased."[89]

Pouring of libation in West Africa is also practiced in Hoodoo.

To have a strong connection with the ancestors in Hoodoo, graveyard dirt is sometimes used. Graveyard dirt from the grave of an ancestor provides protection. Graveyard dirt taken from the grave of a person who is not an ancestor is used to harm an enemy or for protection. Also, graveyard dirt is another primary ingredient used in goofer dust. Graveyard dirt is placed inside mojo bags (conjure bags) to carry a spirit or spirits with you, if they are an ancestor or other spirits. Dirt from graveyards provides a way to have connections to spirits of the dead. In addition, "Grave decorations were another way to quiet restless spirits. In a tradition still practiced in Central Africa, the last articles used by the deceased were placed upon the grave, in the belief they bore a strong spiritual imprint. Bottles, pots, and pans were common. In later years they were augmented by unused medicines, eye glasses, telephones, toasters, electric mixers, even sewing machines, and televisions."[164][165][166] This practice of ancestral reverence, using graveyard dirt, working with spirits of the dead, and decorating graves of family members and giving food offerings to dead relatives so they will not haunt the family, originated from Central Africa's Kongo region that was brought to the United States during the transatlantic slave trade.[167] Also, the West African practice of pouring libations continues in the practice of Hoodoo. Libations are given in Hoodoo as an offering to honor and acknowledge the ancestors.[168]

Hoodoo In Blues Music

Several African American Blues singers and musicians composed songs about the culture of Hoodoo. They were W.C. Handy, Bessie Smith, Robert Johnson, Big Lucky Carter, Al Williams and others. "Blues and Hoodoo have historically kept a close relationship. The same life struggles that could be cured with roots and spirits also ignited the talents and lyrics of blues musicians throughout the Mississippi Delta....The enormous influence of Hoodoo and conjure culture on the blues can be seen in the lives and lyrics of many blues musicians."[169]

Hoodoo In literature

Zora Neale Hurston often employs Hoodoo imagery and references into her literature. In *Sweat,* the protagonist Delia is a washwoman with a fear of snakes. Her cruel husband, Sykes, is a devotee of Li Grande Zombi and uses her ophidiophobia against her to establish dominance. Delia learns Voodoo and Hoodoo and manages to hex Sykes. Another book by Zora Neale Hurston features hoodoo hexes and spells as well as a Hoodoo doctor.[170]


Hurston-Zora-Neale-LOC

Ishmael Reed criticizes the erasure of the African American from the American frontier narrative, as well as exposing the racist context of the American dream and the cultural evolution of the military-industrial complex. He explores the role of Hoodoo in the forging of a uniquely African-American culture. Reed writes about the Neo-hoo-doo aesthetic in aspects of African American culture such as dance, poetry and quilting. His book *Mumbo Jumbo* has many references to hoodoo. *Mumbo Jumbo* has been considered as representing the relationship between the westernized African American narrative and the demands of the western literary canon, and the African tradition at the heart of hoodoo that has defied assimilation. In his book *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down,* the protagonist the Loop Garoo kid acts as an American frontier travelling with the hoodoo church and cursing 'Drag Gibson' the monocultural white American landowner.[171]

In Mama Day by Gloria Naylor, Mama day is a conjuress with an encyclopedic knowledge of plants and the ability to contact her ancestors. The book focuses on benevolent aspects of Hoodoo as a means of elders helping the community and carrying on a tradition, with her saving Bernice's fertility.[172] *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* also explores the deep connection between community empowerment and Hoodoo, in the story, Indigo has healing abilities and makes hoodoo dolls.[173]

Differences from voodoo religions

Hoodoo shows evident links to the practices and beliefs of Fon and Ewe Vodun spiritual folkways.[174] The folkway of Vodun is a more standardized and widely dispersed spiritual practice than Hoodoo. Vodun's modern form is practiced across West Africa in the nations of Benin, Togo, and Burkina Faso, among others. In the Americas, the worship of the Vodoun loa is syncretized with Roman Catholic saints. The Vodou of Haiti, Voodoo of Louisiana, Vodú of Cuba, and the Vudú of the Dominican Republic are related more to Vodun than to

Hoodoo. In *Hoodoo in America,* Zora Neale Hurston wrote: "Veaudeau is the European term for African magic practices and beliefs, but it is unknown to the American Negro. His own name for his practice is hoodoo, both terms being related to the West African term juju. 'Conjure' is also freely used by the American Negro for these practices. In the Bahamas as on the West Coast of Africa the term is obeah. 'Roots' is the Southern Negro's term for folk-doctoring by herbs and prescriptions, and by extension, and because all hoodoo doctors cure by roots, it may be used as a synonym for hoodoo."[175]

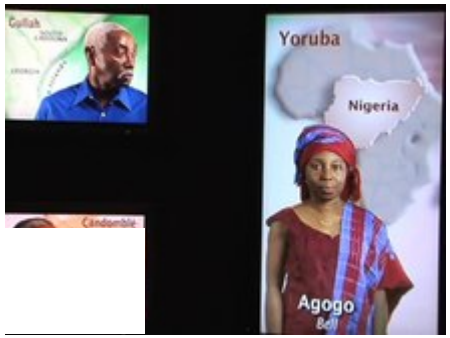


Exhibit showcases endangered culture embraced by African Americans in US South

Archeologists unearthed Hoodoo artifacts on slave plantations in Maryland showing evidence of West African practices in Hoodoo brought over by African slaves.[176] On another plantation in Maryland archeologists unearthed artifacts that showed a blend of Central African and Christian spiritual practices among the slaves. This was Ezekial's Wheel in the bible that blended with the Central African Kongo Cosmogram. The Kongo Cosmogram is an + sometimes enclosed in a circle that resembles the Christian cross. This may explain the connection enslaved black Americans had with the Christian symbol the cross as it resembled their African symbol. Also, the Kongo cosmogram is evident in hoodoo practice among black Americans. Archeologists unearthed on a former slave plantation in South Carolina clay pots made by enslaved Africans that had the Kongo cosmogram engraved onto clay pots.[177] The Kongo cosmogram symbolize the birth, life, death and rebirth cycle of the human soul, and the rising and setting of the sun.[178] "The basic form of this cosmogram is a simple cross with one line representing the boundary between the living world and that of the dead, and the other representing the path of power from below to above, as well as the vertical path across the boundary. Marks on the bases of Colono Ware bowls found in river bottoms and slave quarter sites in South Carolina suggest that more than one hundred and fifty years ago African American priests used similar symbols of the cosmos. While cataloging thousands of Colono Ware sherds, South Carolina archaeologists began noticing marks on the bases of some bowls. Most of these marks were simple crosses. In some cases a circle or rectangle enclosed the cross; in others, 'arms' extended counterclockwise from the ends of the cross. On one there was a circle without a cross, and on a few others we found more complicated marks." The Kongo cosmogram in hoodoo is also represented in physical form called the Crossroads.[179] In the practice of hoodoo, there is much Kongo spiritual beliefs and practices, because the majority of Africans taken from Africa during the slave trade came from the Kongo region, while Voodoo practices orignate from West Africa.[180][181][182]

See also

- Traditional African religion portal

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External links

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- Spiritual Practices in the Lowcountry · Hidden Voices: Enslaved Women in the Lowcountry and U.S. South · Lowcountry Digital History Initiative (http://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/hidden-voices/enslaved-womens-cultural-lives/enslaved-women-and-religion/spiritual-practices)
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- The Hoodoo Tarot (https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Hoodoo-Tarot/Tayannah-Lee-McQuillar/9781620558737)
- 365 Days of Hoodoo by Stephanie Rose Bird | eBook (https://www.scribd.com/book/394271695/365-Days-of-Hoodoo-Daily-Rootwork-Mojo-Conjuration)

- Hoodoo:The Folk Magic of the African Diaspora (http://www.mamiwata.com/hoodoointerview/hoodoointerview.html)
- Hoodoo: An Ancient African & Afro-diaspora Tradition (http://www.mamiwata.com/hoodoo/hoodoo.html)
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- Hoodoo, Rootwork, Conjure, Obeah (https://curlie.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/African/Diasporic/Hoodoo,_Rootwork,_Conjure,_Obeah) at Curlie

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