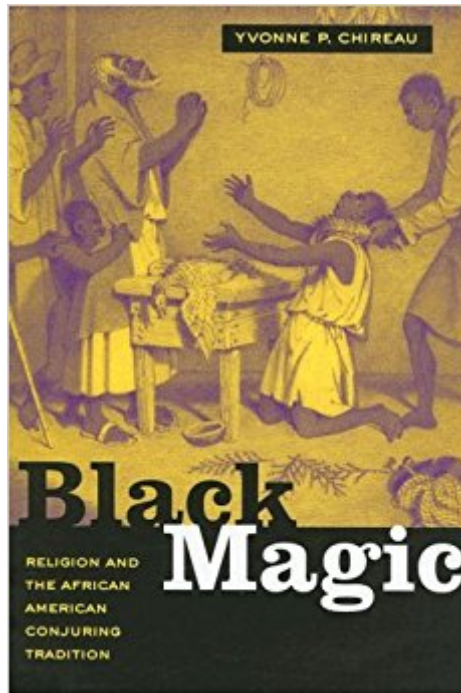




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Black Magic: Religion And The African American Conjuring Tradition



Synopsis

Black Magic looks at the origins, meaning, and uses of Conjure—the African American tradition of healing and harming that evolved from African, European, and American elements—from the slavery period to well into the twentieth century. Illuminating a world that is dimly understood by both scholars and the general public, Yvonne P. Chireau describes Conjure and other related traditions, such as Hoodoo and Rootworking, in a beautifully written, richly detailed history that presents the voices and experiences of African Americans and shows how magic has informed their culture. Focusing on the relationship between Conjure and Christianity, Chireau shows how these seemingly contradictory traditions have worked together in a complex and complementary fashion to provide spiritual empowerment for African Americans, both slave and free, living in white America. As she explores the role of Conjure for African Americans and looks at the transformations of Conjure over time, Chireau also rewrites the dichotomy between magic and religion. With its groundbreaking analysis of an often misunderstood tradition, this book adds an important perspective to our understanding of the myriad dimensions of human spirituality.

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Customer Reviews

"Chireau has written a marvelous text on an important dimension of African-American religious culture. Expanding beyond the usual focus of scholarship on Christianity, she describes and analyzes the world of magical-medical-religious practice, challenging hallowed distinctions among "religion" and "magic." Anyone interested in African-American religion will need to reckon seriously with Chireau's text on conjure." - Albert J. Raboteau, Princeton University "Deprived of their own

traditions and defined as chattel, enslaved Africans formed a new orientation in America. Conjuring - operating alongside of and within both the remnants of African culture and the acquired traditions of North America - served as a theoretical and practical mode of deciphering and divining within this, enabling them to create an alternate meaning of life in the New World. Chireau's is the first full-scale treatment of this important dimension of African American culture and religion. A wonderful book!" - Charles H. Long, Professor of History of Religions University of California, Santa Barbara and author of Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images in the Interpretation of Religion"

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I read this book for a theology course. It arrived in the condition that was advertised, and it was a well-written analysis of its subject. The author ended up visiting my class and was very knowledgeable of her subject. A good academic read.

Hoodoo and conjure are just about the most *natural* things in the world. These magical and religious *bits and pieces* were parts of African Ancestral traditions that survived with the African's who crossed over the sea. They augmented what they brought with them with the flora and the fauna and the condition of enslavement. This history of Hoodoo & Conjure doesn't quite resound with the naturalness of the practice. It beats around the bush fitting what was related to common sense or mother wit onto an interpretive schemata which is itself *other than*, i.e. based on non-African interpretive models formulated for academic analysis. What I love about this book is hearing

the names of the Old Souls and in too few cases seeing a drawing of them. The author has included their own words and this is priceless. What I did not like was the shortness of the work itself, the many footnotes and the doctrate feel of the work. The author joins with Theophus Smith's Conjuring Culture in having more references to other works in footnotes than personal observation due to their own interaction with the subject. This book as is Smith's is sterile. It "tastes" like canned collard greens. For the amount of *new* information included it is also overpriced in the hardcover edition.

A great book. Very informative if you are looking for a book on the history of traditional African American hoodoo, conjuring, magic, and root work. If you are looking for a book that is more instructive or how to practice these traditions, this is not for you. What I found, however, is that it helped to explain some of the practices and *superstitions* that my grandmother and great-grandmother had and showed how Hoodoo and other African American traditions are the only uninterrupted magical traditions besides Native American traditions.

This well-researched, well-written, and richly detailed study illuminates a world that hitherto has been misunderstood by both scholars and the general public and adds greatly to our understanding of the myriad dimensions of African American spirituality. Stephen D. Glazier, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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