

An outsider, passing through certain African American and Latino neighborhoods, begins to notice shops with names like Fulton Religious Supply, Seven Archangels Candle Shop, Botánica San Lazaro, Botánica Hijo de Changó, House of Power, or Yerbería Pancho Villa. Curious, the stranger enters. The interior is crammed from floor to ceiling with a bewildering array of merchandise, some recognizably Christian and some decidedly not. Statues of the saints come in every description, from life-sized images to plastic dashboard icons. The shelves are lined with bottles of bath-and-floor wash, soaps, oils, perfumes, lotions, bath crystals, sachets, sprinkling powders, floor sweeping compound, incense, aerosol sprays, and candles. Their colorful and evocative labels offer Strong Love, Domination, Peaceful Home, Money Jackpot, Get Away Evil, Court Case, High John the Conqueror, or Death Unto My Enemy; they solicit the aid of St. Michael the Archangel, the Seven African Powers, or the Virgin of Guadalupe. Behind the counter are glass jars of dried leaves and flowers, sticks and twigs, brownish powders, twisted black tubers, and pale roots like tiny, shriveled human hands. The display case contains religious medals and holy cards, charm packets and animal bones. Racks exhibit books of prayers and psalms, dream interpretation, and magical formulae. Festoons of necklaces hang from hooks--red and white, red and black, green and black, blue and clear, yellow and amber, all white, and multi-colored. There are conical cement heads with cowrie-shell mouths and eyes, chains adorned with miniature tools, wooden machetes, iron horseshoes, seashells, and silver and brass crowns. And among these seemingly exotic goods, one finds mundane items like laundry bluing, saltpeter, sulfur, lye, ammonia, turpentine, cleaning fluid, and rubbing alcohol. A hand-lettered sign announces that consultations are available.

This is the domain of the spiritual merchants, purveyors of health, attraction, control, success, protection, revenge, luck, the power of the saints, and the authority of the African gods. Their packaged wares, known in the trade as "spiritual products," are mass-produced renditions of the traditional spirit-embodying and spirit-directing charms used in the African-based New World belief systems. The businesses called religious stores or candle shops sell charm ingredients, occult books, and various manufactured potions oriented toward African American Voodoo and hoodoo. In the context of this book, Voodoo refers to the organized religion, closely related to Haitian Vodou, that flourished in New Orleans during the colonial period and into the nineteenth century and is now experiencing a revival. Hoodoo (called rootwork in the Georgia and South Carolina Low Country) denotes the magical practices of "workers" or "doctors" who serve individual clients. As many black Americans abandon such beliefs, hoodoo-oriented religious stores and candle shops are becoming rare. More common are the businesses known as *botánicas*, offering plants, products, and ritual

paraphernalia to the followers of Santería, an Afro-Cuban religion practiced primarily by immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. In the Southwest, similar stores called *yerberías* stock the herbs and charms used in the Mexican systems of healing and sorcery called *curanderismo* and *brujería*, as well as Santería-oriented products that have been adopted by Mexican-Americans.