

The Influence of European and European-American Occult Texts on African American Hoodoo

The Historical Background of African American Magico-Religious Practices

African American magical and religious practices combined African origins with European influences. During the colonial and early-American periods, enslaved people all over the South worked alongside white indentured servants and “redemptioners,” some of whom practiced popular magic combined with folk Christianity. One can speculate that African and African-descended slaves absorbed these beliefs into their own magical traditions. By the early twentieth century, African Americans had access to published books of rituals and charm formulae. This article examines the ways in which European and European-American occult texts were distributed to practitioners of these diverse traditions and incorporated into the corpus of magical knowledge.¹

Conjure/Rootwork/Hoodoo in the Anglo-Protestant South

Most of the white settlers of the Atlantic Seaboard colonies, later the states of Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, were English-speaking Protestants. Traders brought the first enslaved Africans to Virginia in 1619, and slavery gradually spread to the rest of the English colonies. Approximately one-third of the slaves imported to the Atlantic Seaboard colonies/states were Kongo-related peoples from Central Africa, who believed their deities to be personified by *minkisi*, sacred figures and assemblages of magical ingredients formulated and distributed by ritual specialists called *nganga*.²

Protestant Christianity, with its emphasis on one god and the austerity of its ritual, initially had little appeal for Africans and people of African descent. Only later did Baptist and Methodist evangelists persuade enslaved and free blacks to accept the Christian faith. The church had no tolerance for “superstition” of any kind, but an African-based magical belief system continued to operate outside the confines of Protestant Christianity. In the nineteenth century, this system of folk magic was referred to as *conjure* or *tricking*, or, less often, by the English terms *witchcraft* or *cunning*. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the practice was usually called *rootwork* in the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands and Low Country, and *hoodoo* in the Deep South, especially in the Gulf Coast and Mississippi Delta area. At present the term *hoodoo* is most frequently

encountered.³ Individual conjurers, root workers, and hoodoo doctors, analogous to the Kongo *nganga*, performed rituals and prepared charms for clients.

Voudou in New Orleans and Environs

Louisiana, particularly New Orleans, differed vastly from the Anglo-Protestant South. The Louisiana colony was established by the French in 1699 and was under French governance until 1763, when control passed to the Spanish. It became an American territory after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, and was granted statehood in 1812. Roman Catholicism was the official religion during the colonial period, and the influence of the Catholic Church is still pervasive in New Orleans and South Louisiana.

Beginning in 1719, the French imported enslaved Wolof, Bambara, Foulbe, Mandinga, Fon, and Yoruba people from what are now the West African nations of Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana, Mali, Benin, Togo, and Nigeria. These peoples, especially the Fon and Yoruba, shared a belief in a supreme being and a pantheon of spiritual entities who acted as intermediaries between men and women and the supreme being. By the late eighteenth century, the Spanish were importing more Kongo-related people, and their beliefs mingled with those of the West Africans.⁴

In colonial Louisiana, newly arrived Africans were baptized and instructed in the Roman Catholic faith, where they would have found many elements to which they could relate. Their supreme being was analogous to God the Father, and their lesser deities became identified with the saints. Catholic rituals, liturgical music, offerings, vestments, and miracle-working sacramental objects seemed intrinsically familiar to enslaved Africans whose religious ceremonies stressed chanting, drumming, dance, spirit possession, offerings, elaborate costumes, and the use of magical amulets. Through a process of creative borrowing and adaptation, they reinterpreted Roman Catholicism to suit their own needs. The result was Voudou, an Afro-Catholic religion with a priesthood and an organized community of believers.

Voudou flourished in New Orleans until at least the 1870s. But as the city became increasingly Americanized in the later nineteenth century, the religion came under attack and was virtually eradicated by the early twentieth century. African American magico-religious practices in New Orleans and the surrounding Gulf Coast and Mississippi Delta region became more like the conjure/rootwork/hoodoo of the rest of the American South, but still retained Roman Catholic

influences such as the use of altars, candles, incense, oils, holy water, and images of the saints.⁵

Rituals and Charms

Unfortunately, there are few accurate, eye-witness accounts of magical and religious practices in the Atlantic Seaboard or New Orleans areas during the colonial and early American periods. We therefore have no record of that seminal period when enslaved Africans continued their native traditions. By the late nineteenth century, former slaves such as Frederick Douglass and Henry Bibb had published memoirs that included accounts of conjuring, and articles about conjure based on interviews with African Americans appeared in *The Southern Workman*, a monthly journal of the historically black Hampton Institute in Virginia.⁶

Several studies of southern hoodoo and rootwork were undertaken in the 1920s-1940s. Newbell Niles Puckett, a white Mississippian, conducted a survey that was published in 1926 as *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro*. The African American anthropologist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston collected hoodoo-related material in Florida and New Orleans, published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1931 as “Hoodoo in America” and in her 1935 book *Mules and Men*. Harry Middleton Hyatt's *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork*, a five-volume collection of interviews with hoodoo practitioners recorded between 1936 and 1941, is one of the most important sources of material on African American magical practices. The interviews conducted by the Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Projects Administration between 1935 and 1942 are equally important.⁷

These sources confirm that the practitioners of African-based magico-religious traditions performed rituals and formulated charms for the purpose of influencing physical, mental, and spiritual health; manipulating personal relationships and the actions of others; and invoking the aid of the deities, the dead, and the impersonal concept of “luck.” Ritual actions simulated the desired outcome. Charms took the form of teas and salves; baths and washes; oils; powders and sweeping compounds; fumigants; and magical ingredients assembled in a little bag, a bottle, or other container.⁸

The 1920s-1940s saw the rise of the so-called “spiritual products” business. Mail-order entrepreneurs and the retail outlets variously known as “hoodoo drugstores,” “candle shops,” or “religious stores” sold all the paraphernalia necessary for performing rituals and formulating charms. The earliest of these spiritual merchants were African Americans, but white entrepreneurs, particularly pharmacists and the makers of cosmetics and cleaning products, soon saw an

opportunity to make money. These suppliers carried dried roots and herbs; minerals such as lodestones and crystals; animal teeth, claws, bones, and other body parts; and manufactured incense, candles, oils, perfumes, powders, and soaps alleged to have magical properties. Along with these items, they also sold occult books, including English translations of European texts, books of dream interpretation and lucky numbers, and books of magical formulae created by twentieth-century American writers.

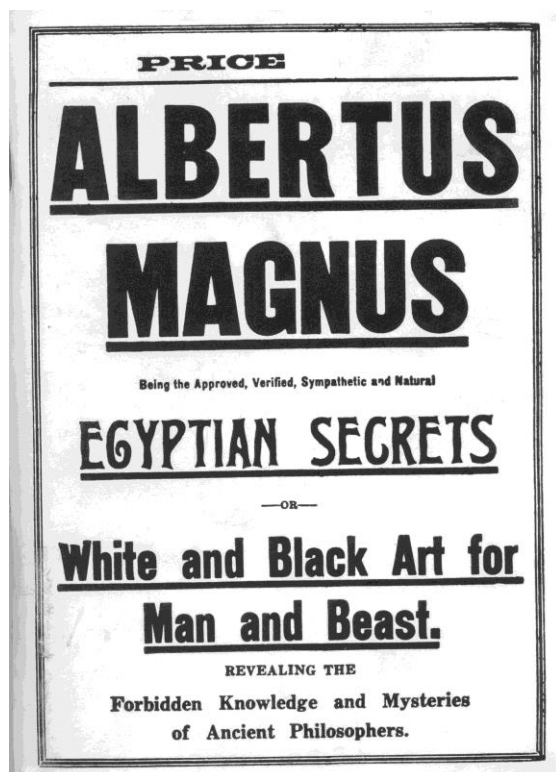
A History of European Occult Texts

In Europe, occult texts were originally circulated in manuscript form. Printed books began to appear in the early 1500s. Some offered rituals and charms for healing; protection of people, livestock, and crops from human enemies and evil spirits; attracting a lover; detecting thieves and recovering stolen goods; and finding hidden treasure. Others included treatises on alchemy, astrology, and instructions for conjuring up angels, demons, the dead, or the devil himself to do the bidding of the spell-caster. Such books have come to be known as *grimoires*, possibly derived from the French word *grammaire*, which originally referred to a work written in Latin.⁹ Only a few of the many grimoires produced by European publishers found their way into the hands of African American hoodoo practitioners.

German Texts

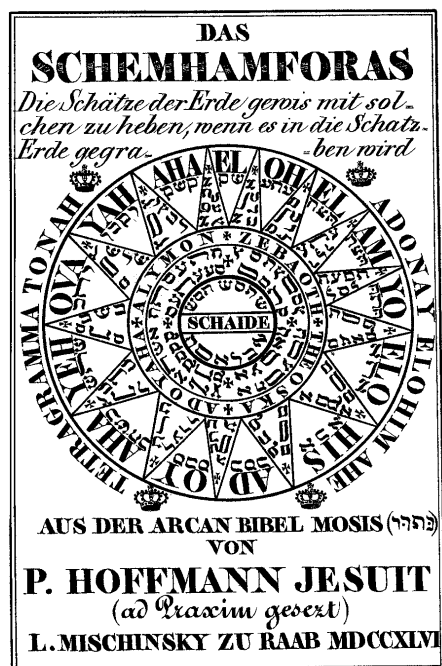
Interestingly, the books that became popular among English-speaking conjurers, rootworkers, and hoodoo doctors were not English publications, but English translations of German texts.¹⁰ Two of the standards of African American hoodoo—*Albertus Magnus' Egyptian Secrets* and *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*—originated in Germany and were introduced into the United States by the Pennsylvania German community during the nineteenth century.¹¹

Albertus Magnus' bewährte und approbirte sympathetische und natürliche egyptische Geheimnisse für Menschen und Vieh (Albertus Magnus' Proven and Verified Sympathetic and Natural Egyptian Secrets for Man and Beast) was first published in Germany around 1725. It was published in German by Louis Ensslin in Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1842, translated into English in 1875, and has been reprinted many times.¹²



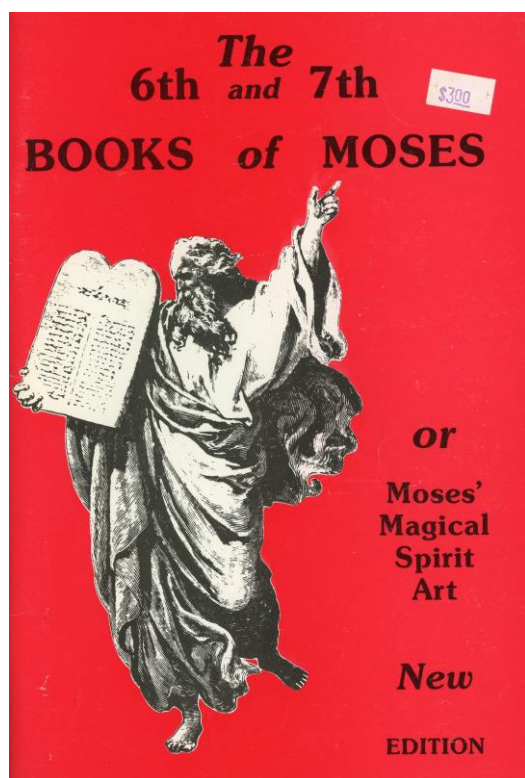
My personal copy of *Albertus Magnus' Egyptian Secrets* has no publisher or date. It is identical to the one in the Houdini Collection in the Library of Congress Rare Book Room, which is stamped “bequest of Harry Houdini, April 1927.”

Die Sechsten und Siebten Buch Moses (The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses), published in Germany by Johann Scheible in 1849, is based on the Kabbalah and other Hebrew texts. The first section consists of magical seals with their accompanying uses, such as the Seal of Fortune and Long Life; the Seal of Dreams and Visions; the Seal of Good Luck, Play, and Games; and the Seal of Shemhamforas, that “brings to light the treasures of the earth.”



“Das Schemhamforas,” from *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, Joseph H. Peterson, Esoteric Archives, www.esotericarchives.com/moses/67moses.htm.

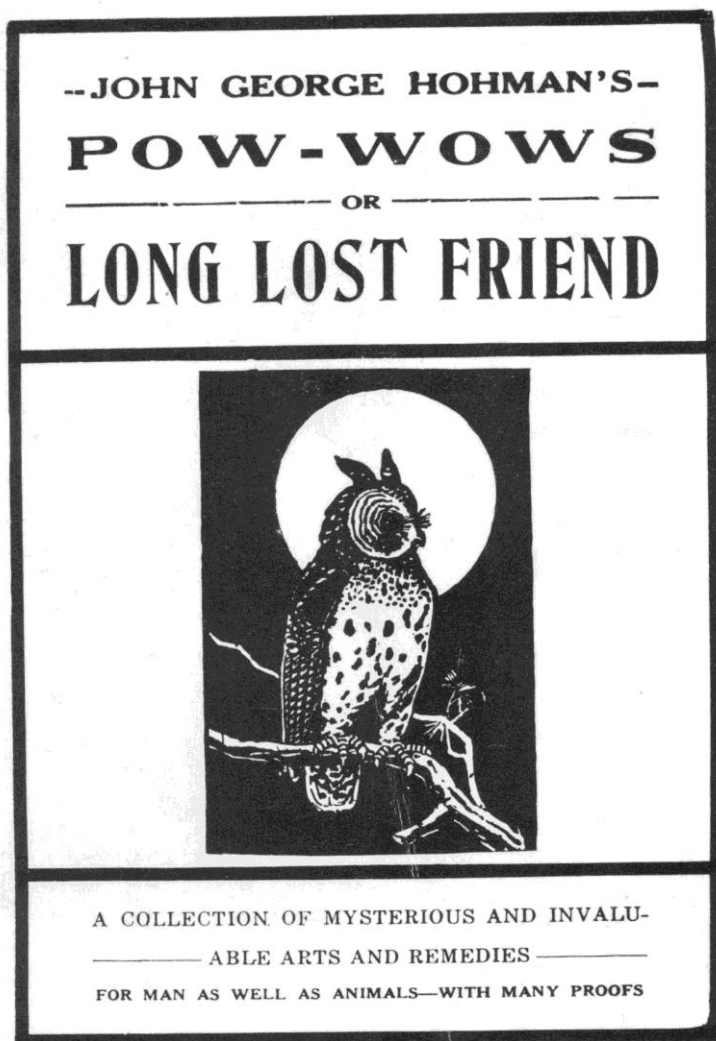
The rest of *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* is a conglomeration of treatises on “The Magic of the Israelites,” “Formulas of the Magical Kabbalah,” an “Extract from the Genuine and True Clavicula of Solomon the King of Israel,” the “Arcana Magica of Alexander,” the “Citation of the Seven Great Princes,” the “Magical Cures of the Old Hebrews,” and the “Use of the Psalms for the Physical Welfare of Man.” An inaccurate and garbled English translation of *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* was published in New York in 1880. Subsequent reprints have repeated its many errors, making the book nearly unintelligible to English-speaking readers.¹³ An English translation of “Use of the Psalms” was also issued separately as *Secrets of the Psalms*.



My personal copy of *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* (undated) is subtitled “Moses’ magical spirit-art, taken from rare old Mosaic books of the Talmud and Kabala; contains copies of original seals and talismans; translated from the German original, word for word, according to the old ancient writings and famous manuscripts of the Hebrews.” It was printed by Dorene Publishing Company of Arlington, Texas; the owners of Dorene Publishing are related to the owners of Fulton Religious Supply in Brooklyn.

A German-American spell book titled *Lange Verborgene Freund* (Long Lost Friend) was first published in Pennsylvania in 1820. The book contains rituals and formulae nearly identical to those found in *Albertus Magnus’ Egyptian Secrets*. The compiler, Johann Georg Hohman, arrived in Pennsylvania from Germany in 1802. Hohman was a *braucher* (from the German verb *brauchen*, “to use or try for”), a form of folk magic and healing. He stated in the preface that the book was “partly derived from a work published by a Gypsy, partly from secret writings, and collected with much pain and trouble from all parts of the world.” *Lange Verborgene Freund* was translated into English as

Pow-Wows or The Long Lost Friend in 1855. The name “Pow-Wows” comes from an Algonquian word denoting a conjurer or medicine man or a ceremony for curing the sick.¹⁴ Like *Egyptian Secrets* and *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, *The Long Lost Friend* has undergone many reprints.



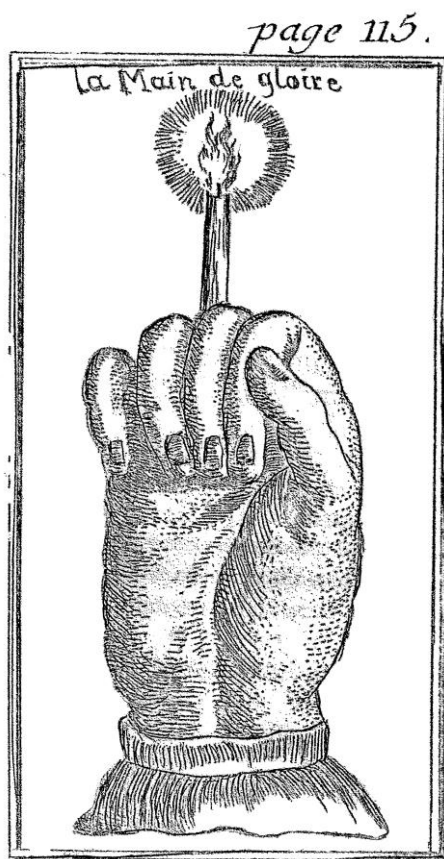
My personal copy of *Pow-Wows* (undated) was published by Fulton Religious Supply Company, 1304 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, New York. It also contains advertisements for spiritual products.

French Texts

A different set of occult texts originated in France. In the late 1600s and early 1700s, French publishers mass-produced inexpensive grimoires collectively known as the *Bibliothèque Bleue* because of their blue paper covers. Thousands of copies were distributed by traveling peddlers, and by the nineteenth century the books had spread to the rest of Europe and Britain, and from there to the Caribbean colonies and Louisiana. Among the offerings of the *Bibliothèque Bleue* were *Les Secrets*

Merveilleux de la Magie Naturelle du Petit Albert (Little Albert's Marvelous Secrets of Natural Magic) by Albertus Parvus Lucius; *Le Grand Grimoire ou Dragon Rouge* (The Red Dragon); and *Les Précieuses Qualités et Propriétés de la Petite Poule Noire* (The Precious Qualities and Properties of the Little Black Pullet).¹⁵

Most of the contents of *Les Secrets Merveilleux*, popularly known as the “Petit Albert,” are completely innocuous. Somewhat like *Egyptian Secrets* and *Pow-Wows*, the text gives advice on medicine, palm-reading, gardening, fishing, exterminating vermin, and formulating cosmetics. One section, however, deals with talismans, particularly *Le Main de Gloire dont se servent les scélérats voleurs, pour entrer dans les maisons de nuit sans empêchement*. (Hand of Glory used by villainous rogues to enter houses at night without hindrance). The Hand of Glory was made from the preserved hand of a hanged criminal; burning a candle inserted between the fingers was supposed to throw householders into a deep sleep and allow thieves to work undetected.



La Main de Gloire, Illustration from *Les Secrets Merveilleux de la Magie Naturelle du Petit Albert*, Joseph H. Peterson, Esoteric Archives, www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/petitalb.htm

Le Grand Grimoire and *La Petite Poule Noire* are far less innocent, containing instructions for calling up demons and making diabolical pacts.¹⁶

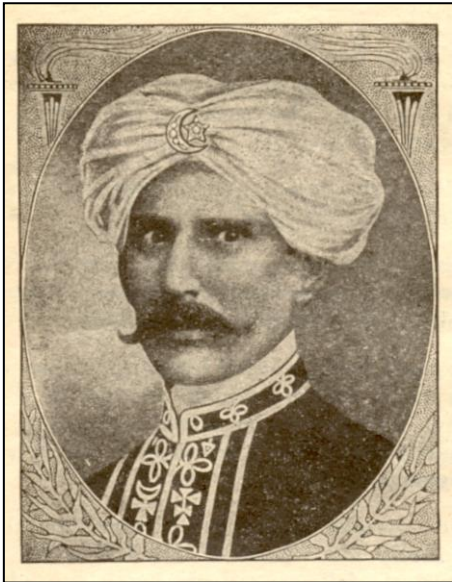


This illustration from *Le Grand Grimoire* shows how to make a pact with the demon Lucifuge Rofocale, Joseph H. Peterson, Esoteric Archives, www.esotericarchives.com/Solomon/grand.htm.

English translations of *Le Grand Grimoire* and *La Petite Poule Noire* (with a few obscure and relatively inaccessible exceptions) have not been sold through spiritual supply stores or mail-order catalogs, and have had little influence beyond the French-speaking population of Louisiana.¹⁷

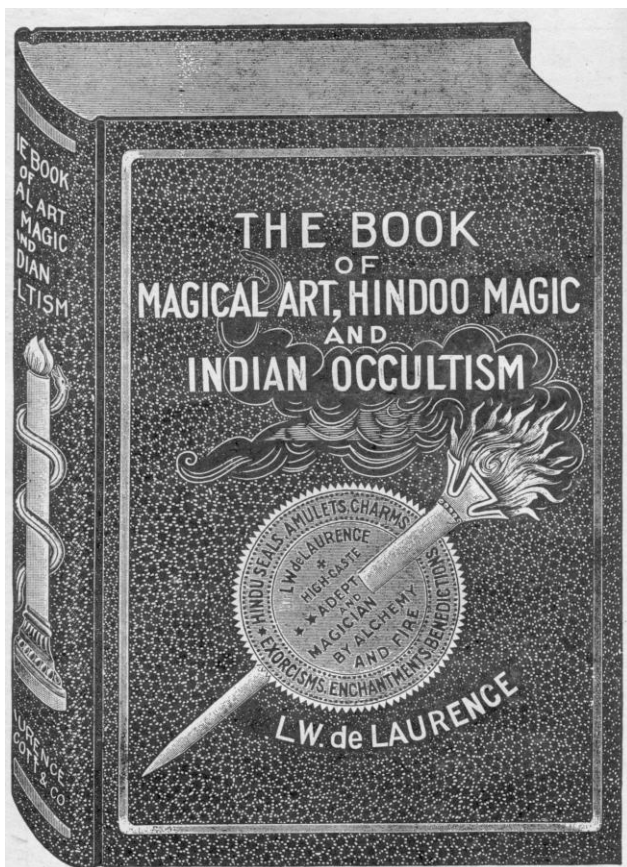
European-American Occult Texts

In the twentieth century, American publishers began to produce magical texts of their own devising. The most important publisher of occult books in the United States was DeLaurence, Scott, and Company of Chicago, later the L.W. DeLaurence Company. For most of the twentieth century, DeLaurence specialized in books on hypnotism, magic, the Kabbalah, Spiritualism, and Hindu mysticism, and also offered a full range of spiritual products.¹⁸ The founder, Lauron William DeLaurence, was born in Ohio in 1868 to a French-Canadian father and an American mother.¹⁹



Books and catalogs published by DeLaurence featured his portrait arrayed in a turban and bejeweled tunic. DeLaurence catalog (undated), collection of the author.

DeLaurence's best seller was his self-published 1902 creation, *The Book of Magical Art, Hindoo Magic, and Indian Occultism*, a massive tome cobbled together from material lifted from many sources.

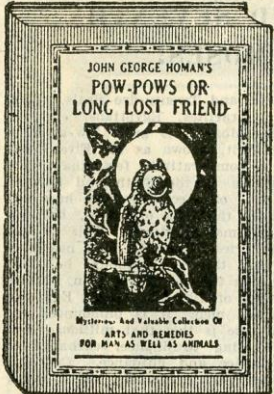


Advertisement for *The Book of Magical Art*, DeLaurence catalog (undated), collection of the author.

In 1910 DeLaurence, Scott and Company reissued the English translations of *Albertus Magnus' Egyptian Secrets*, *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, *Secrets of the Psalms*, and *Pow-Wows or the Long Lost Friend*.

Some hoodoo doctors interviewed by the Louisiana Writers' Project and Harry Middleton Hyatt mentioned DeLaurence, Scott, and Company, although they garbled the name. Nathan Hobley of New Orleans told an employee of the Louisiana Writers' Project that he had been an agent for "Laurence D. Scott, the India spiritualist." Hobley proudly displayed his copy of *The Book of Magical Art*, which the interviewer described as being bound in heavy black leather and weighing at least two pounds.²⁰ One of Hyatt's New Orleans informants gave a complicated formula for a talisman to be worn "under your left arm or bound to your forehead" as was customary "way back in ancient days. The only person who knows about it now is the man in Chicago, Dr. DeLong." He added that if "the law" caught a black man with *The Book of Magical Art*, "they'd take it away from him."²¹

The Book of Magical Art, *Egyptian Secrets*, *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, *Secrets of the Psalms*, and *Pow-Wows* were distributed as magical spell books, not only by DeLaurence, but by most other sellers of spiritual products. During 1920s-1940s these merchants advertised occult texts in their mail-order catalogs.



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Note: The books on this page are of an unknown origin. They have been brought down from periods of the past. The actual authority for these books is unknown. They are sold as curio books only. We know you will be delighted in purchasing them.

R.C.Adams of Chicago, catalog 1929, collection of the author.

The King Novelty Company of Chicago sold *Pow-Woms* and *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*. They also advertised individual seals “taken from The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses and from ancient Quabalistic records, reproduced on genuine virgin parchment in dove's blood red ink,” which were to be carried for various purposes and “anoointed with a sacred oil once every ten days.”

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Advertisement for *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, King Novelty catalog 1945, collection of the author.

In addition, the spiritual products companies offered other, lesser-known occult texts, books on dream interpretation and fortune-telling, and guides to good health and success.²²

Influence of Occult Texts on Hoodoo Practitioners

Interviews indicate that twentieth-century hoodoo practitioners were borrowing and reinterpreting certain charm formulae from *Egyptian Secrets*, *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, and *Pow-Woms*.

While some informants spoke of owning and using these books, others presented the rituals and charm formulae as their own, meaning that this knowledge had already entered hoodoo lore and was

by then being passed from one practitioner to another.

In *Egyptian Secrets* we find a ritual “To Make a Mirror in which Everything may be Discerned”:

Procure a looking glass, such as are commonly sold. Inscribe the characters...S. Solam S. Tattler S. Echogardner Gemater...upon it. Bury it on the crossing of two pathways, during an uneven hour. On the third day thereafter, hie to the place at the same hour, and take it out. It is best to let a dog or a cat take the first look into the mirror.

Hyatt's St. Petersburg, Florida, informant gave a version of the magic mirror ritual: “Buy you a lookin' glass...and go to the crossroads.... You can write certain things on that lookin' glass and place it under the ground...and return at the same hour on the third day and take it out. You...can look in the mirror and tell what a person's doin'--if you was here and they was in New York, it be just the same as you was right there lookin' at 'em.” A hoodoo doctor in Waycross added that “When you take up that looking glass, let a cat or dog look in it before you do.... Then you can see all the image of your enemies in that glass.”²³

A charm from *Pom-Woms* was intended “for gaining a lawful suit”:

If anyone has to settle a just claim by way of a lawsuit let him take some of the largest kind of sage and write the name of the twelve apostles on the leaves and put them in his shoes before entering the courthouse, and he shall certainly gain the suit.

Hyatt collected many variations of this formula. Madam Collins of Memphis related that if the charge was murder, “you get twelve sage leaves and write the twelve...disciples names on there--all but Judas... The 'leven sage leaves go in one shoe...and the one sage leaf which is Judas is separated from the others, put that in the other shoe.” A Brunswick, Georgia, informant substituted strips of paper for the sage leaves. These were to be tacked under the chairs of the judge, the state's attorney, and the jury, and the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* was to be placed over the courtroom door. Madam Griffin of Norfolk used the sage leaf charm to get a job: “You take some green sage....

There's twelve disciples...Mark, John, Peter, Luke, and all them boys.... You write six on one [sage leaf] and six on the other.... Then you fixes that in a cloth and put it in your shoes. You go to that boss and he'll try to say no...but you've got the twelve disciples with you.”²⁴

Pow-Wows offers another charm “to retain the right in court and council”:

Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Judeorum. Carry these characters with you, written on paper, and then repeat the following words: ‘I (*name*) appear before the house of the Judge. Three dead men look out of the window; one having no tongue, the other having no lungs, and the third was sick, blind, and dumb.’ This is intended to be used when you are standing before a court in your right, and the judge not being favorably disposed toward you.

Two Florida practitioners gave versions of this charm. In Jacksonville, Hyatt was told that a person appearing before the court should say to himself: “‘There were three dead men hanging out the window...one had no lungs, one was blind, the other one was deaf...[and] dumb.’ Then you say to yourself, ‘Tell the judge I want justice, tell the judge I wanta be dismissed..’ And there'll be mercy following 'tween you and that court if those words is uttered.” The St. Petersburg informant offered a very similar version. The accused was to write on a piece of paper: “‘There were three mens looked out of a window--one havin' no eyes, one havin' no lungs, the other was deaf, blind, and dumb. God help me in this case, that I shall be dealt with accordin' to justice in cooperation with this affair.’ Just repeat that three times. The judge sure won't convict you.”²⁵

A woman in Brunswick, Georgia, combined the twelve disciples charm with the incantation of the three dead men. The accused was to write the names of the disciples on each of nine sage leaves and put them in his or her shoes, and “When you go down before the judge, you repeat them words.... ‘Three dead men looked out of the window; one had no lungs, the other had no tongue, and the third was deaf, dumb, and blind. Holy Spirit, speak for me as I pray three times a day. Only goodness and mercy follow me to my grave.’ The judge...will either give you a suspended sentence or turn you loose.”²⁶

We also find in *Pow-Wows* a charm for winning at cards: “Tie the heart of a bat with a red silken string to the right arm.” Many African-American gambling charms include the heart of a bat, but two collected by Hyatt are remarkably similar to the one from *Pow-Wows*. The previously-cited

informant in St. Petersburg, Florida, told Hyatt: “Well, you kill you a bull bat and take the heart... Take and sew it up in a red piece of silk cloth and...tie it right to your arm with a piece of silk string, and any game that you get into at cards for money, you can't lose.” Hyatt collected an almost identical gambling charm in Florence, South Carolina: “You can take a bat for a gamblin' hand... Take that heart out of him...and get you a piece of red silk ribbon...and sew it up...and wear it on your left arm. Wet it with Hearts [Hoyt's] Cologne and...anything you turn you hand to, you'll win.”²⁷

The examples given above would lead one to believe that *The Book of Magical Art*, *Albertus Magnus' Egyptian Secrets*, *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, *Secrets of the Psalms*, and *Pow-Woms* exercised a great influence on African American hoodoo charm formulae, but a careful reading of the twentieth-century interviews by Harry Middleton Hyatt and the Louisiana Writers' Project shows that practitioners were using only selected items from European and European-American texts. The charms for treating bewitched pigs, horses that foundered, hens that ceased to lay, and cows whose milk dried up never turn up in the hoodoo interviews. And even though hoodoo doctors were concerned with curing human ills, attracting a lover, restoring sexual potency, detecting criminals, recovering stolen goods, and finding buried treasure, they usually employed their own traditional rituals and charm formulae. It seems that simply *owning* one of these books served to impress clients and was considered a source of power and protection.

Given the defects of the English translation of *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, one wonders if the old-time hoodoo doctors, some of whom were barely literate, were able to make any sense of it. Yet it was mentioned by interviewees more frequently than any other text. One of Hyatt's Memphis informants said that in order to activate a charm “You'd have to talk Hebrew-like.... The Hebrew language, that's in *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* an' the balance is in the ninety-one psalms of David.” A New Orleans man told Hyatt that “Hoodooism was given down from the foundation of Moses long years back.... Moses...started it [when he] writ the Seven Book of Moses.” A man in Fayetteville, North Carolina, assured Hyatt that *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* was “the onliest book that tell you what the Psalms is good for.”²⁸

Some practitioners were employing the “Use of the Psalms for the Physical Welfare of Man” included in *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*. The instructions for Psalm 20 tell the person “summoned to appear before the judge” to “mix in a vessel, rose-oil, water, and salt, pray over it seven times...this Psalm...then anoint with this oil your face and hands and sprinkle it on your clothing,” and “you will surely be justified and depart without restraint.” The previously cited

Fayetteville informant told Hyatt that “If you had a lawsuit, you can get rose water an’ salt, en’ then consecrate [with] the 20th Psalm and sprinkle some of that [around the courtroom.]”²⁹ The instructions for Psalm 109 from *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* state that if you have “a mighty enemy, who plagues and oppresses you, fill a new jug with new, sparkling wine, add some mustard to it, and then repeat this Psalm three days successively.... Afterwards pour the mixture before the door of your enemy’s dwelling.” A woman in Algiers, Louisiana (across the river from New Orleans), gave Hyatt a ritual to make an enemy lose his job: “Get you a new glass jar...an’ get you some wine an’...a bottle of Coleman mustard, an’ you put in this jar, an’ you read the 109th Psalms of David over [it] for three days...at just the time [of day] he start on his job. On the third day, give it to his landlady and let her bust that jar.”³⁰ Aside from these examples, most hoodoo charm formulae that included the recitation of a psalm did not correspond to the applications assigned in the “Uses of the Psalms.”

The inexpensive French grimoires published as the Bibliothèque Bleue, such as *Le Petit Albert*, the *Le Grand Grimoire ou Dragon Rouge*, and *La Petite Poule Noire*, found their way to the French colonies and former colonies, including Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) and Louisiana. These books were probably already present in New Orleans, and when more than 10,000 refugees from the Haitian Revolution resettled in New Orleans during the first decade of the nineteenth century, one can imagine that some carried grimoires secreted among their possessions. Elements of European magic were thus incorporated into Voodoo in Haiti and New Orleans.³¹

By the 1930s-1940s, when fieldworkers for the Louisiana Writers’ Project were interviewing African American informants in New Orleans, there was no mention of *Le Grand Grimoire* or *La Petite Poule Noire*. These practitioners of a Voodoo-influenced form of hoodoo did refer to *Les Secrets Merveilleux du Petit Albert*, which they called the *‘Tit Albert*, pronounced “Tee Albere.” Charles Raphael declared that he had owned a *‘Tit Albert*, which the Writers’ Project interviewer characterized as “a sort of Voodoo bible...said among the colored people to be a dangerous book to own. Insanity will certainly overtake the one whose curiosity leads him to peruse its contents.” Mr. Raphael told the story of his neighbor, a plumber, who “pestered him to borrow the book until, in a fit of impatience, Raphael lent it to him and washed his hands of the whole matter. After reading it, the plumber suddenly ran under his house and slit his throat.”³² Given the rather mundane contents of the *Petit Albert*, one wonders what all the fuss was about. Had these interviewees actually read the

text, or did the peril lie in simply possessing the book?

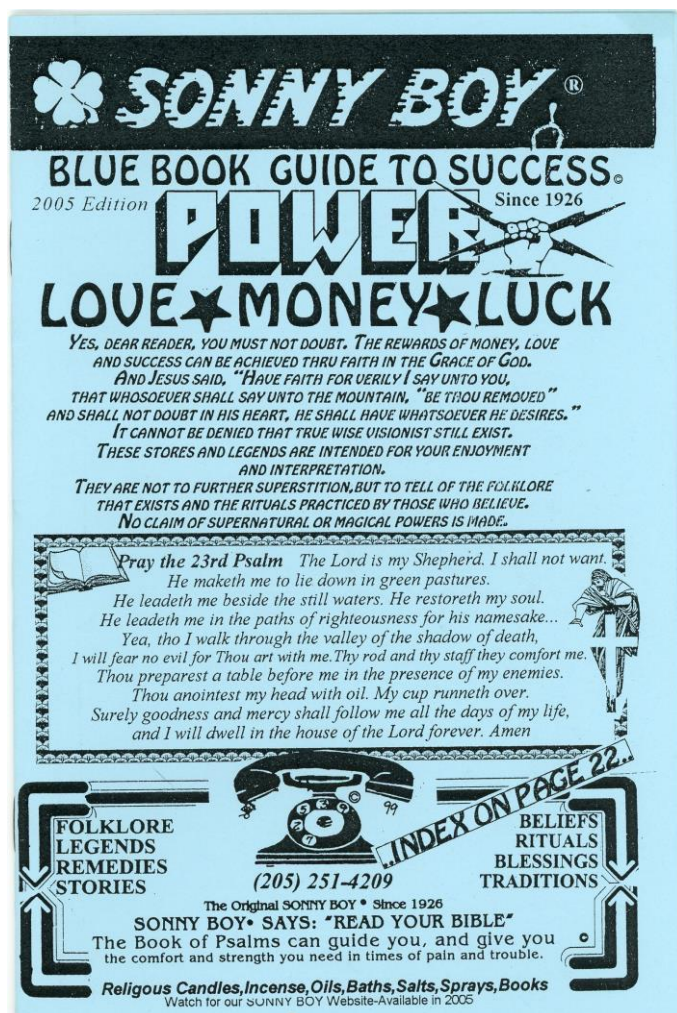
Occult Texts Produced by American Manufacturers and Retailers

In addition to the European occult texts discussed above, the white manufacturers and retailers of spiritual products and books also produced magical spell books that call for ingredients provided by the publisher or seller of the book. What may have been the first of this genre, a booklet called *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*, was printed in New Orleans sometime in the early twentieth century. Interestingly, it had a blue paper cover, reminiscent of the earlier productions of the Bibliothèque Bleue.³³ Despite its title, *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau* bears no relation to the famous nineteenth-century Voudou priestess of that name. It was written as a series of petitions, each related to a specific problem, followed by instructions for a ritual to alleviate the difficulty. Its archaic, pseudo-Biblical language seems to have been inspired by *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* or DeLaurence's *Book of Magical Art*. *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau* also contained horoscopes, instructions for praying the Novena, a section on the significance of candles, and a short essay on Spiritism, attributed to "Bivens, N.P.D." The identity of Bivens and the significance of the initials N.P.D. remain a mystery.

The Life and Works of Marie Laveau was probably created as a sales vehicle for New Orleans' most famous and longest-running "hoodoo drugstore," the Cracker Jack, which sold all the herbs, minerals, animal parts, and commercially-produced washes, oils, powders, incense, and candles required to carry out the rituals. The Cracker Jack was founded in 1897 by George A. Thomas, a trained pharmacist born in New Orleans of Belgian parents. Thomas was later joined in the business by his French-born wife, Alice Vibert.³⁴ Mrs. Thomas might have been familiar with the doctrines of the French occultist Allan Kardec, founder of Spiritism.

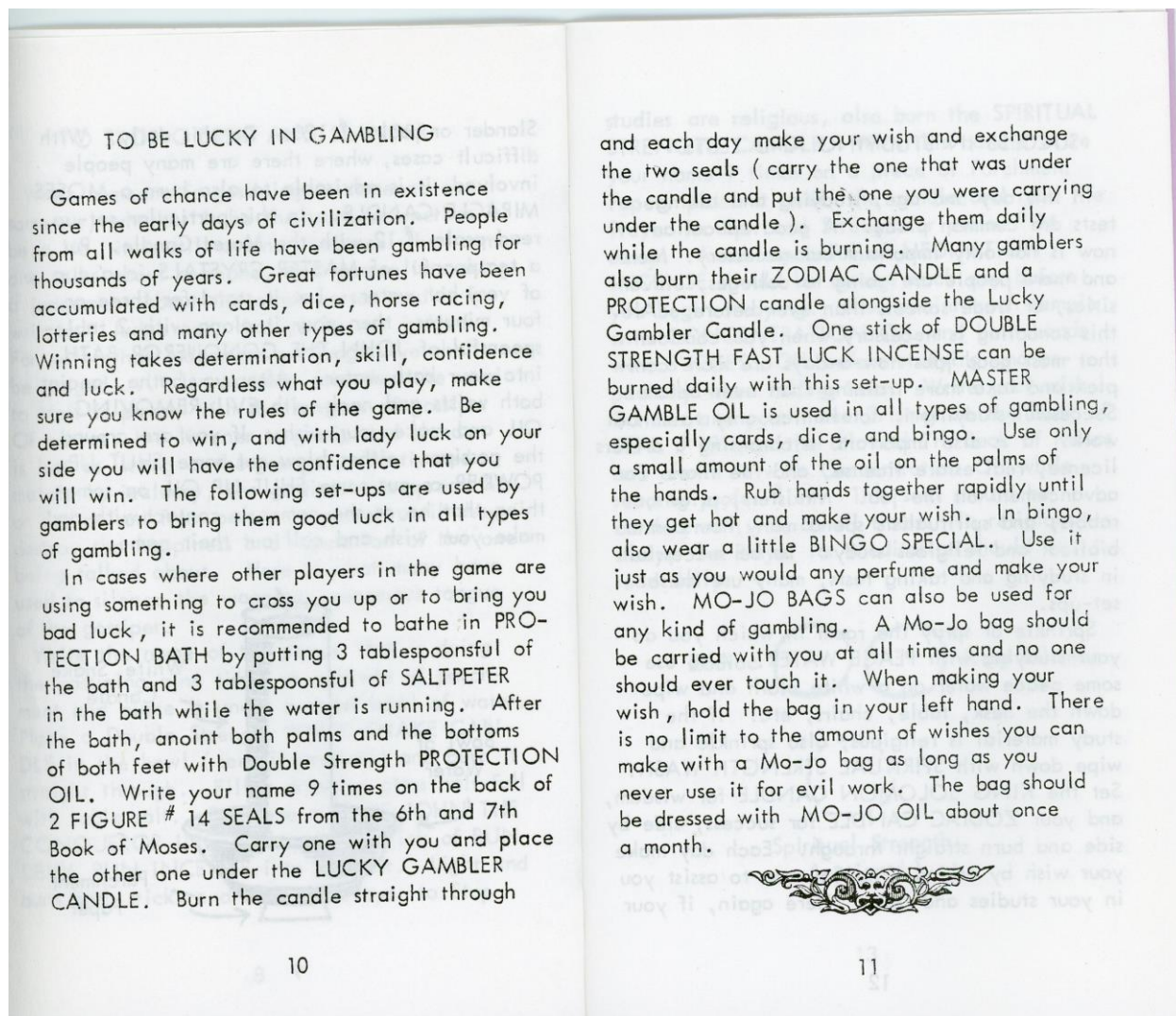
In addition to *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*, the Cracker Jack sold other popular occult texts. *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* was specifically mentioned in a 1928 newspaper article headlined "Voodooism Still Thrives in New Orleans." The article described an African American customer who was assembling supplies for treasure-hunting, including a Shemhamforas (a magical seal featured in *The Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses*) made from chamois skin lettered with "dove's blood red ink," to "open the pores of the earth."³⁵ Customers may not have actually been reading *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, but they were definitely using the seals, which were reproduced and sold separately.

In 1926, a larger spiritual supply company, Sonny Boy Products of Miami (later Birmingham), printed a combination mail-order retail catalog and spell-book called the *Sonny Boy Guide to Success*. This booklet appears to have been modeled on *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*, even to the blue paper cover. Unlike *The Life and Works*, which was little known outside the New Orleans area, the *Guide to Success* was distributed nationally. The *Sonny Boy Guide to Success* gives little anecdotes with titles like “Can You Attract a Lover?,” “Can You Be Successful in Business?,” “Can You Make a Court Case Go Your Way?,” “Do You Know How to Protect Your Home and Loved Ones from Evil?,” and “Do You Know How to Cross Someone Through a Spell?” A course of action is prescribed and the distressed person, having bought the requisite Sonny Boy products and performed the ritual, presumably achieves satisfaction.³⁶ The *Guide to Success* is still available from the Sonny Boy website, <http://www.sonnyboyonline.com/>.



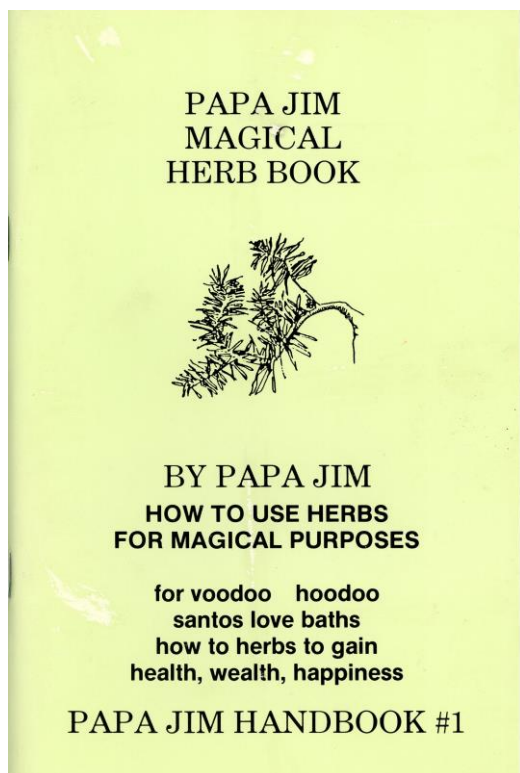
2005 edition of the *Sonny Boy Blue Book Guide to Success*, originally printed in 1926. Collection of the author.

Later manufacturers and retailers of spiritual products also printed their own combination mail-order catalog/spell books. The Allan Company of Houston issued a series of pamphlets called *The Guidebook to Black and White Magic*, "A collection of special occult set-ups using the best in black and white magic that is being used today by many successful spiritualists, workers, & psychic readers who have brought all the most powerful secrets of the ancient world to modern times."³⁷



Pictured above is the Allan Company's *Guidebook to Black and White Magic*, Book 2, copyright Richle Press 1976, collection of the author. In addition to spiritual products from the Allan Company, the ritual calls for a seal from the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*.

Papa Jim's, a spiritual supplier in San Antonio, produced the *Papa Jim Magical Herb Book*, *Medicinal Herbs Commonly Used*, the *Magical Oil Book*, the *Papa Jim Candle Book*, and the *Papa Jim Dream Book*. All of these publications contain instructions that, while not identical to any specific rituals or charm formulae from twentieth-century sources, use the same symbolic actions and ingredients found in traditional African American conjure/rootwork/hoodoo.³⁸

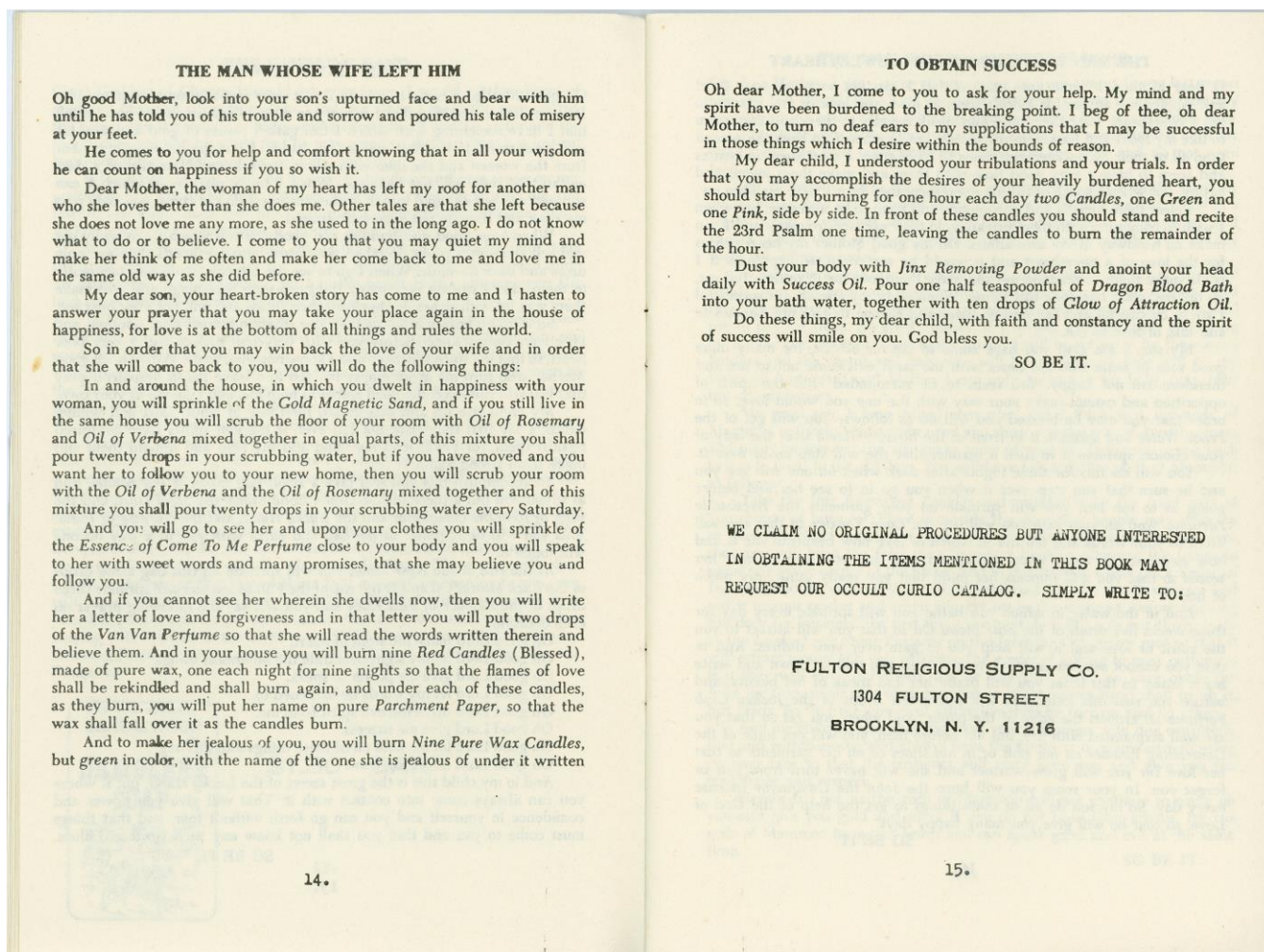


Jim Sicafus, *Papa Jim Magical Herb Book* (1989), collection of the author.

The Spitalnik family (who later changed their name to Kay) were the proprietors of Fulton Religious Supply of Brooklyn, New York. Fulton Religious Supply reprinted *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau* under the title *Marie Laveau's Old and New Black and White Magic*, and issued a reprint of *Pow-Wows*. The store has been in business at 1304 Fulton Street since 1962 and has a website, <https://www.fultoncultural.com/>.

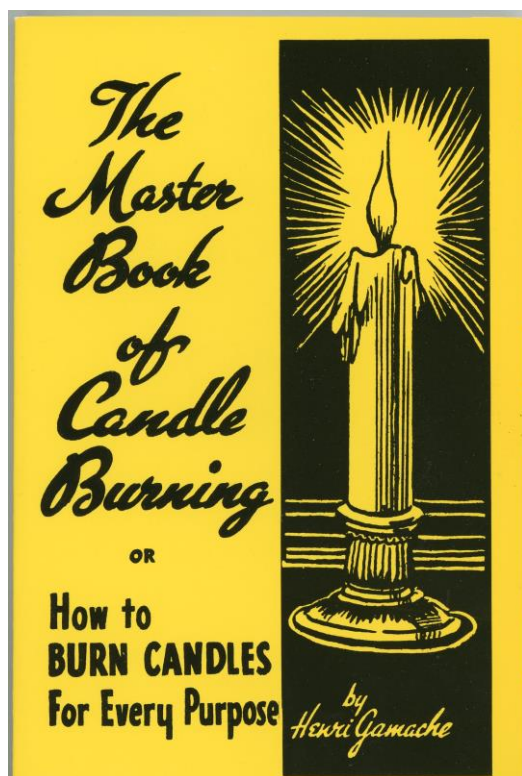
Another branch of this family owned the Dorene Publishing Company of Arlington, Texas. Dorene produced the twentieth-century occult standards by “Lewis de Claremont” and “Henri Gamache.” The names “de Claremont” and “Gamache” are thought to be pseudonyms; the real identity of the author or authors is unknown. De Claremont is credited with *The Ancients Book of*

Magic; Legends of Incense, Herbs, and Oils; Secrets of Attraction; How to Get Your Winning Number; The Ten Lost Books of the Prophets; The Seven Keys to Power; and The Seven Steps to Power, published between 1936 and 1940. Henri Gamache is the supposed author of *The Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Books of Moses; The Master Key to Occult Secrets; The Master Book of Candle Burning; Protection Against Evil and Harm; and The Magic of Herbs*, published between 1942 and 1946.³⁹



Pictured above is a page from an undated copy of *Marie Laveau's Old and New Black and White Magic*, a reprint of *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau* by Fulton Religious Supply of Brooklyn. Collection of the author.

Of the Dorene titles by “de Claremont” and “Gamache,” only *The Master Book of Candle Burning* seems to have had much influence on African American magical practices. When visiting old-time spiritual-supply stores in the 1990s (Ray’s New Age Curios, Philadelphia; Keystone Lucky Store, Jacksonville, Florida), I saw evidence that the instructions from *The Master Book of Candle Burning* were being put to use. At the request of customers, store personnel had assembled candles of various colors and shapes--man, woman, devil, skull, or cross--symbolizing the intention of the client, in an aluminum tray to be burned on an altar at the back of the shop.



Henri Gamache, *The Master Book of Candle Burning*, originally published by Dorene in 1942, reprint by Original Publications. Collection of the author.

Conclusion

Albertus Magnus' Egyptian Secrets, *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, *Secrets of the Psalms*, and *Pow-Wows* were widely distributed to an African American clientele by the purveyors of spiritual products. The fact that they were advertised in mail-order catalogs from the 1920s onward, and are now listed on company websites, demonstrates that customers were (and still are) buying these books. The examples cited in this article, however, are isolated instances. They fairly leap from the pages because their formal, archaic language is so obviously different from the traditional African

American ritual and charm formulae recorded in the late nineteenth century by former slaves Fredrick Douglas and Henry Bibb and by students at the Hampton Institute, and collected in the first decades of the twentieth century by Newbell Niles Puckett, Zora Neale Hurston, Harry Middleton Hyatt, and fieldworkers for the Federal Writers' Project. Hoodoo practitioners certainly owned these books, but one wonders whether they actually read the texts that sometimes amount to incomprehensible gibberish.

Much more attuned to traditional hoodoo practice were the books and pamphlets of magical formulae, such as *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*, *Sonny Boy Guide to Success*, the Allan Company's *Guidebook to Black and White Magic*, the "Papa Jim" books, and *The Master Book of Candle Burning*, published by the manufacturers and retailers of spiritual products. Even though these entrepreneurs were people of European ancestry, they based their publications on knowledge gleaned from their African American customers, who in turn passed on formulae from these modest booklets to other community members. Thus the folk magic known as conjure, rootwork, or hoodoo became codified through this interchange between spiritual merchants and their clientele.

Notes

1. For more on the influence of occult texts on hoodoo, see Carolyn Morrow Long, *Spiritual Merchants: Religion, Magic, and Commerce* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 16, 120-122; Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magical Books* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2009), 240-242; Catherine Yronwode, "Hoodoo in Theory and Practice," Lucky Mojo Curio Company, <http://www.luckymojo.com/hoodoohistory.html>.
2. Wyatt MacGaffey, *The BaKongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); *Art and Healing of the Bakongo Commented by Themselves: Minkisi from the Laman Collection* (Stolckholm: Folkens Museum-Ethnografiska, 1991); "The Eyes of Understanding: Kongo Minkisi," in *Astonishment and Power: Kongo Minkisi and the Art of Renee Stout* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art, 1993).
3. All of these terms are found in the interviews conducted by Harry Middleton Hyatt in 1936-1940 (*Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork*, 5 vols., Hannibal, Missouri: Western Publishing Company, 1970-1978). For older usage of the terms *cunning* and *witchcraft* in interviews conducted by the Hampton Institute in the late nineteenth century, see Donald J. Waters, editor, *Strange Ways and Sweet Dreams: Folklore from the Hampton Institute* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983).
4. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 29-95.
5. For a complete discussion of southern hoodoo and New Orleans Voodoo, see Long, *Spiritual Merchants*, and *A New Orleans Voodoo Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).
6. Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* (1892, reprint New York: Collier Books, 1962), 27-143. Henry Bibb, in Gilbert Osofsky, editor, *Puttin' On Ole Massa; The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northrup* (1969), 70-71. Samuel Chapman Armstrong, "Conjure Doctors in the South," *Southern Workman*, April 1878; Alice M. Bacon and Leonora Herron, "Conjuring and Conjure Doctors in the Southern United States," *Southern Workman* July 1895, November 1895, December 1895. These articles, based on reports collected by the African American students, were written by white administrators and teachers at the Hampton Institute. All are reproduced in Waters, *Strange Ways and Sweet Dreams*.
7. Newbell Niles Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (1926, reprint Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith Reprint Series, 1968). Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo in America" (*Journal of American Folklore* 44, October-December 1931), 320-417; *Mules and Men* (1935, reprint New York: Harper Perennial Library, 1990). Some of the interviews from the Federal Writers' Project have been reprinted in George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 1972). Some are incorporated into Georgia Writers' Project, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (1940, reprint Athens: University of Georgia Press, Brown Thrasher Books, 1986). Some are at the Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress. The Louisiana Writers' Project files are housed at Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana, Watson Memorial Library, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Federal

Writers' Collection, 1937-1941.

8. Long, *Spiritual Merchants*, xvi-xix.

9. Davies, *Grimoires*, 1-43.

10. Owen Davies explains that although fortune-telling guides and dream books were popular in Britain, the publication of cheap and accessible grimoires never developed owing to the fear of prosecution by the authorities. Booksellers in London and other cities therefore provided French and German texts and produced expensive manuscript translations in English, Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), 130-131; Davies, *Grimoires*, 132-138.

11. Davies, *Grimoires*, 118-123. The title of *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* refers to the fact that the first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—are called the five books of Moses.

12. *The Egyptian Secrets of Albertus Magnus*, Joseph H. Peterson, Esoteric Archives, <http://www.esotericarchives.com/moses\egyptian.htm>.

13. For more on the publication of *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* see Davies, *Grimoires*, 123, and Joseph Peterson, Esoteric Archives, <http://www.esotericarchives.com/moses/67moses.htm>. The collection of manuscripts was first published by Johann Scheible of Stuttgart in his larger work, *Das Kloster*. According to Peterson, all subsequent editions in English have repeated the errors of the 1880 translation (Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania: Victor Printing Co.) and “have consequently been deficient in many ways, with poorly executed drawings and Hebrew lettering, drawings printed upside down, mistakes in transcription and translation, passages censured and other substantial omissions.”

14. Don Yoder, “Hohman and Romanus,” in Wayland Hand, ed., *American Folk Medicine* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1976), 235-247. Yoder gives evidence that a principal source of *Lange Verborgene Freund* was a German book called *Romanusbüchlein*, which was first published in 1788; this would be the “work published by a Gypsy” [Roma] to which Hohman refers in his preface. A. Monroe Aurand, *The “Pow-Wow” Book: A Treatise on the Art of “Healing by Prayer” and “Laying on of Hands,” Etc.* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Aurand Press, 1929).

15. For more on these French grimoires, see Davies, *Grimoires*, 98-111.

16. *Les Secrets Merveilleux du Petit Albert* (Lyon: Beringos Freres, 1668), *Le Grand Grimoire avec le Grande Clavicule de Salomon et la Magie Noire* (no publisher, c. 1760), and *La Petite Poule Noire* (Paris: P. Baudouin, 1843) can be examined in the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress. The books measure approximately 3.5 inches (9 cm) wide by 6 inches (15 cm) high, and have between 88 and 180 pages. *Le Grand Grimoire* has a blue paper cover, but the others have red marbled paper covers.

17. Elbee Wright’s *The Book of Magical Talismans* claims to include “all the magical items and their

uses as described in *The Black Pullet*” (Minneapolis: Marlar Publishing Co., 1984), but it is not an actual translation of *Le Petite Poule Noire*. For a discussion of other, less-accessible translations, see Catherine Yronwode, <http://www.arcane-archive.org/occultism/magic/books/darcy-kutz-and-the-black-pullet-1.php>.

18. For many years, the L.W. DeLaurence Company was located at 180 North Wabash Avenue in Chicago. Around 2001, the company moved to 3780 North Wozniak Road, Michigan City, Indiana, and is now identified on its website as a jewelry manufacturer. For more on DeLaurence, see Long, *Spiritual Merchants*, 189-193; Davies, *Grimoires*, 214-231; Philip Deslippe, “The Hindu in Hoodoo: Fake Yogis, Pseudo-Swamis, and the Manufacture of African-American Folk Magic” (*Amerasia Journal* 40, No. 1, 2014), 34-56.

19. U.S. Census for Chicago, 1920, Loren (*sic*) W. DeLaurence, publisher and book dealer, wife Pauline, and thirteen-year-old son Velo, 4634 Drexel Blvd; Enumeration District 166, sheet 7, line 38, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., accessed through Ancestry.com. Death certificate for Lauron William DeLaurence, Department of Public Health, Division of Vital Statistics, Cook County, Chicago, Illinois, September 11, 1936, no. 26763. His parents were listed as William DeLaurence of Canada and Mary Walker of Ohio; he was divorced from his wife, Pauline DeLaurence. Cause of death coronary thrombosis.

20. Interview with Nathan Hobley by Zoe Posey, January, 1941, Louisiana Writers’ Project (hereafter LWP), folder 25.

21. “The Unkus Man,” New Orleans, March 17, 1938, Hyatt, *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork* 2: 1297-1298, 1308. Hyatt seldom identified his informants by their real names, but instead assigned each person a descriptive nickname.

22. R.C. Adams Company, 3105 Sheffield Avenue, Chicago; King Novelty/Valmor Company, 2244 Cottage Grove, Chicago.

23. *Egyptian Secrets*, 89. “Publicity and Healing,” St. Petersburg, Hyatt, *Hoodoo* 2, 1238; “Laughing Doctor,” Waycross, Hyatt, *Hoodoo* 2, 1487.

24. Hohman, *Pow-Wows*, 46. Hyatt recorded many variations on the sage-leaf charm in Volume 4 of *Hoodoo*, 3695-3698. “Madam Collins,” Memphis, 1939, Hyatt, *Hoodoo* 2: 1010; “Grandson Talks About Doctor Jones,” Brunswick, 2: 1747; “Madam Griffin,” Norfolk, 2: 1311.

25. Hohman, *Pow-Wows*, 63. Note that the formula from *Pow-Wows* specifies that the third of the dead men is “sick, blind, and dumb,” while Hyatt’s informants made him “deaf, blind, and dumb.” “Met Doctor Buzzard,” Jacksonville, Hyatt, *Hoodoo* 2: 1421; “Publicity and Healing,” St. Petersburg, 2: 1244.

26. Informant 1175, Brunswick, Hyatt, *Hoodoo* 4: 3697-3698.

27. Hohman, *Pow-Wows*, 61. “Publicity and Healing,” St. Petersburg, Hyatt, *Hoodoo* 2: 1243-1244; “Doctor at Ease,” Florence, 2: 1041.

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28. “Mojo Expert,” Memphis, November 30, 1939, Hyatt, *Hoodoo* 2: 1255; “Hoodoo Book Man,” New Orleans, March 1938, 2: 1758; “Drugged Doctor,” Fayetteville, 2: 1522-1523.
29. *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, Psalm 20, 96. “Drugged Doctor,” Fayetteville, Hyatt, *Hoodoo* 2: 1522-1523.
30. *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, Psalm 109, 107. “Custodian of a Shrine,” Algiers, February 28, 1940, Hyatt, *Hoodoo* 2: 1141.
31. Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique, “Underground Realms of Being: Vodoun Magic, in Cosentino, ed., *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Los Angeles: University of California Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), 163. Davies, *Grimoires*, 159-163.
32. Interview with Charles Raphael by Jacques Villere and Hazel Breaux, n.d., LWP folder 25. The *Tit Albert* is also mentioned in the interviews with Aileen Eugene, no interviewer, n.d., LWP folder 25, and Mrs. J. Fortune, no interviewer, n.d., LWP folder 44.
33. The original version of *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*, with its blue cover, was described by Catherine Dillon, “Voodoo/Stuff and Nonsense,” LWP folder 118c, 13-14. The booklet was cited as evidence in a mail fraud case against an unidentified New Orleans druggist, probably the owner of the Cracker Jack Drug Store (“Federal Agents Expose Business in Goofer Dust,” *New Orleans Morning Tribune*, May 14, 1927; p. 1, c. 3).
34. George A. Thomas, druggist, U.S. census for New Orleans 1900, 5th Precinct, sheet 23a, line 37; U.S. census for New Orleans 1910, 3rd Precinct, sheet 27a, line 29; 1920, 4th Ward, sheet 8b, line 67, National Archives and Records Administration, accessed through Ancestry.com. George Thomas died in 1940, and his widow continued to run the Cracker Jack until 1974. For more on the Cracker Jack and *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*, see Long, *Spiritual Merchants*, 144-148; *A New Orleans Vodou Priestess*, 117; and “The Cracker Jack: A Hoodoo Drugstore in the Cradle of Jazz,” *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, Spring 2015, <http://www.knowlouisiana.org/crackerjack> .
35. Marguerite Young, “Voodooism Still Thrives in New Orleans,” *Item-Tribune* magazine section, April 22, 1928. This article cites *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* and *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau* as being sold at a drugstore on South Rampart Street near Poydras; the Cracker Jack was located at 435 South Rampart between Poydras and Perdido Streets, in the heart of what was then New Orleans’ African American commercial district.
36. For more on Sonny Boy Products, see Long, *Spiritual Merchants*, 111, 149, 150, 155, 189, 205-207, 241, 245, 249, 263.
37. I visited the Allan Company (1803 McGowen Street, Houston, Texas) in the late 1990s. The Allan Company does not turn up in an online search and is presumed to be closed.

38. I visited Papa Jim's (5630 South Flores, San Antonio, Texas) in the late 1990s. Papa Jim's is still in business and has a website <http://www.papajimsbotanica.com/index.php>.

39. For more on the Spitalnik/Kay family, their business ventures, and the possible identity of "Louis de Claremont" and "Henri Gamache," see Long, *Spiritual Merchants*, 123-24, 164, 189, 209-11, 214, 244. See also Catherine Yronwode, "The Enduring Occult Mystery of Lewis de Claremont, Louis de Clermont, Godfrey Spencer, Henri Gamache, Joe Kay, Joseph Spitalnick, Black Herman, Benjamin Rucker, and the elusive Mr. Young," <http://www.luckymojo.com/young.html>.