

Resilience, Representation and Reclamation: Unravelling the Tapestry of New Orleans' Spiritual Legacy and Cultural Impact.



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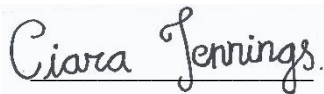
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Declaration of Originality.

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) 3D Design, Modelmaking & Digital Art. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ciara Jennings." The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Ciara Jennings.

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Abstract

Voodoo has emerged as a symbol of New Orleans' cultural identity, yet its portrayal in mainstream media, largely influenced by Western perspectives, has been fraught with inaccuracies. These misrepresentations, stemming from a predominantly white male viewpoint, have had enduring repercussions on the city's cultural landscape. This thesis explores the origins of these misconceptions and examines their lasting impact on the community. The narrative begins by unravelling the transatlantic slave trade's historical crucible, where enslaved Africans showcased remarkable resilience in shaping a distinctive spiritual practice that became an integral facet of New Orleans' cultural landscape. This thesis critically examines mainstream media's problematic representations of New Orleans Voodoo, highlighting the resultant widespread misconceptions and urging for a more informed portrayal. It then explores the multifaceted impact of cultural acceptance and exploitation of Voodoo within New Orleans, shedding light on both positive and negative consequences for the city's cultural landscape. From shaping traditions and festivals to influencing art, music, and architecture, Voodoo serves as a symbol of resilience and adaptability, connecting residents to their roots. While cultural tourism thrives, economic opportunities emerge, creating a delicate balance between cultural appreciation and potential exploitation. This thesis underscores the city's ability to leverage Voodoo's interest for economic and cultural benefits yet advocates for a thoughtful and respectful approach to safeguard its authenticity.

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Introduction

Unraveling the Mystique of New Orleans Voodoo.

This thesis is not merely an academic exploration but a testament to the resilience, adaptability, and cultural continuity of enslaved Africans whose indomitable spirit gave rise to New Orleans Voodoo. Through a critical examination of its origins, media representations, and cultural impact, this thesis aims to unravel the complexities of this spiritual tradition and advocate for a more nuanced understanding within the broader cultural conversation. This thesis explores the true origin of this eccentric religious practice starting with its Haitian roots before further investigating the western influence. It embarks on an exploration of the unique origins of New Orleans Voodoo, tracing its development within the historical crucible of the transatlantic slave trade. In the rich and diverse tapestry of New Orleans' cultural and spiritual history, Voodoo emerges as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of enslaved Africans, becoming an integral part of the city's cultural landscape. This free-form system of worship, deeply embedded in the city's fabric, has left a lasting imprint on the art, music, and overall mystique of New Orleans.

Chapter one unveils the pivotal role played by these individuals in shaping the spiritual practice, resisting dehumanization through the establishment of a distinctive three-part social order in New Orleans. Enslaved Africans brought with them not only their agricultural knowledge but also a rich tapestry of spiritual traditions that laid the foundation for the syncretic nature of New Orleans Voodoo.

This thesis delves into the fusion of African, Native American, and European influences, notably the syncretic approach that incorporated elements of Catholicism. This fortuitous hybrid was evident in famous Voodoo priestess, Marie Laveau, a devout Catholic who attended Mass at St. Louis Cathedral and was a close friend of the cathedral's priest, Pere Antoine. This adaptability allowed Voodoo practitioners to preserve essential elements of their traditional practices while navigating the religious expectations of those in power. The enduring presence of African cultural spirit distinguishes New Orleans Voodoo, intertwining vibrant traditions of music, drumming, dance, and rituals into its religious practices. It explores the profound impact of Voodoo queens and priestesses. These key figures preserved, transmitted, and shaped the religious and spiritual aspects of this syncretic tradition. They functioned as

intermediaries between the human and spirit realms, provided enslaved individuals with empowerment, resistance, and a sanctuary for preserving African spiritual practices. This thesis lays the foundation for a deeper understanding of New Orleans Voodoo, setting the stage for an exploration of its multifaceted origins and the profound impact of cultural, spiritual, and historical forces that have shaped this distinctive tradition. The enduring legacy of New Orleans Voodoo stands as a testament to the resilience and cultural continuity of enslaved Africans, crafting something new while preserving the past in the face of formidable challenges.

Chapter 2 of this thesis delves into the intricate and often problematic representations of New Orleans Voodoo in mainstream media, exploring the repercussions of these portrayals.

Many individuals perceive Voodoo through the lens of Western portrayals without understanding its true origins, leading to widespread misconceptions regarding the nature and purpose of this religious tradition. The media's frequent misrepresentation of this spiritual practice is analyzed across various platforms, including television, film, literature, and video games. From Hollywood horror films to hyper-realistic video games, New Orleans Voodoo is frequently depicted as a sinister and malevolent force, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and misconceptions. The chapter critically examines how mainstream representation capitalizes on inaccuracies and reinforces these misleading portrayals. It addresses the impact of these misrepresentations, not only in terms of their effect on the public but also the tangible consequences for Voodoo practitioners and the communities within New Orleans. Techniques such as imagery, symbolism, racial diversity, motivated lighting, and real-life inspirations are used to uncover the deliberate crafting of an eerie atmosphere surrounding Voodoo in media.

In the initial part of this chapter, the focus is on the media's frequent misrepresentation of well-known Voodoo practitioners, exploring the reasons behind these inaccuracies. Using examples from films and television series such as 'American Horror Story: Coven,' the thesis unveils how characters are often depicted as malevolent figures driven by a thirst for revenge. It acknowledges instances where certain portrayals, like Angela Bassett's portrayal of Marie Laveau in 'American Horror Story' exhibit a more accurate representation of historical figures associated with Voodoo. The complex narrative presented through these characters challenges stereotypes and offers a nuanced

perspective on the diverse identities within the Black community. This thesis also examines the portrayal of race, magic and religion in films like 'I Walked with a Zombie' and 'American Horror Story: Coven,' shedding light on the racially divided modes of magic presented in these narratives. Directors utilize cinematic lighting techniques to emphasize the depiction of adversarial relationships between predominantly white covens and African American Voodoo practitioners. The nuanced plays of light contribute to the heightened tension, emphasizing the racial and magical divide within the narrative.

The analysis extends to contemporary video games and films such as 'Resident Evil 7' and 'Spell,' which perpetuate a malevolent perception of Voodoo using imagery and symbolism. The chapter emphasizes the disconnection between these sensationalized elements, for example Voodoo dolls, and the actual practices of New Orleans Voodoo. It argues that these media representations contribute to a distorted public perception of the spiritual tradition, fostering misconceptions and reinforcing inaccurate stereotypes. This thesis highlights the urgent need for a critical examination of media representations of New Orleans Voodoo. It underscores the detrimental impact of perpetuating harmful stereotypes and urges for a more accurate and nuanced understanding of this culturally rich and complex tradition within the broader cultural conversation. Chapter 2 sets the stage for the subsequent exploration of efforts to challenge and correct these misrepresentations, advocating for a more responsible and informed portrayal of New Orleans Voodoo in mainstream media. This thesis also delves into the multifaceted impact of the cultural acceptance and exploitation of Voodoo within the vibrant mosaic of New Orleans. As previously mentioned, mainstream media often misrepresents this spiritual tradition, perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions.

The third chapter aims to explore the diverse effects these inaccurate depictions have had on the New Orleans community, shedding light on both the positive and negative impacts on the city's cultural landscape.

At the core of New Orleans' cultural identity lies Voodoo, a religion deeply intertwined with the city's history and traditions. The third chapter sets out to unravel the consequences of misinterpretations while unveiling the economic, cultural, and social advantages that have emerged as a result. It becomes evident that the community has strategically adapted to capitalize on the fascination surrounding this misunderstood

religion, leading to a unique intersection of cultural acceptance and exploitation. Examining the influence of Voodoo on art, music, architecture, and traditions, this thesis displays how this spiritual practice has shaped the cultural tapestry of the city. New traditions and festivals inspired by or invented through the practice of Voodoo have become cultural celebrations, highlighting the city's vibrant diversity and reflecting the creative evolution of cultural practices. The delicate balance between cultural acceptance and exploitation has resulted in a significant boost in tourism in New Orleans. Voodoo serves not only as a spiritual aspect but also as a symbol of resilience and adaptability displayed by the locals. Within the city's complex tapestry of diverse traditions, Voodoo plays a crucial role in connecting residents to their roots and heritage. Efforts to dispel misconceptions and promote accurate information about Voodoo have proven crucial in nurturing a deeper appreciation for the city's cultural heritage.

Cultural tourism in New Orleans is profoundly influenced by the sensationalized portrayal of Voodoo, attracting visitors fascinated by the mysterious allure surrounding this practice. Specialized museums, guided tours, and a market for Voodoo-themed merchandise have created economic opportunities for local artisans and entrepreneurs. The integration of Voodoo into various facets of the city's tourism, enhances the allure of cultural exploration in New Orleans, fostering economic sustainability and enriching the exploration of the city's cultural heritage. Festivals celebrating Voodoo, such as the Voodoo Music + Arts Experience, serve as platforms for artistic expression, stimulating the local job market and contributing to the city's economic dynamics. While these festivals foster community pride and engagement, they also pose the risk of perpetuating stereotypes or misunderstandings about the religion, resulting in a precarious balance between economic advantages and potential negative effects.

The artistic expressions inspired by Voodoo in New Orleans create a nuanced narrative that bridges tradition and contemporary perspectives, reality and imagination. Local artists and filmmakers draw inspiration from the mystique and intrigue surrounding Voodoo, leading to authentic explorations that honor its traditions. Misrepresentations perpetuated by popular media have also seeped into artistic expressions, resulting in exaggerated and sometimes inaccurate depictions. Voodoo's influence on New Orleans extends beyond spirituality and culture, leaving a lasting mark on the city's architecture. Practitioners craft sacred spaces and altars within homes and neighborhoods, impacting the interior design and integrating Voodoo into the city's architectural identity.

This thesis unveils the complex interplay between cultural acceptance and exploitation of Voodoo within the New Orleans community. It highlights the city's ability to leverage the interest surrounding this spiritual tradition for economic and cultural benefits. It also emphasizes the need for a thoughtful and respectful approach to safeguard the authenticity of Voodoo, ensuring its rich cultural legacy continues to thrive within the dynamic landscape of New Orleans and beyond.

Chapter 1

The Resilient Roots - The unique origin of New Orleans voodoo in relation to the transatlantic slave trade.

In the rich and complex tapestry of New Orleans' cultural and spiritual history, the origins of Voodoo stand out as a testament to the enduring resilience and adaptability of enslaved Africans during the transatlantic slave trade. This free-form system of worship became an integral part of the city's cultural landscape, with its practices and rituals evolving over time. Voodoo is deeply embedded in the cultural and historical fabric of the city and has had a noteworthy influence on the art, music, and overall mystique of New Orleans. To understand the true purpose and values of this spiritual practice this thesis first endeavors to share a deeper understanding of the unique origin¹. The key characteristics of New Orleans voodoo in relation to the origin consists of African roots, Syncretism, Catholic influence, Iwa, Hoodoo, Voodoo queens and priestesses. The richness of New Orleans Voodoo lies in its ability to adapt and merge diverse cultural elements into a cohesive and meaningful spiritual practice. Against the backdrop of oppressive conditions, New Orleans Voodoo became a form of resistance and survival for enslaved individuals, offering solace, empowerment, and a connection to ancestral roots. The spiritual practice provided a foundation for community-building and identity amidst the harsh realities of slavery, giving rise to a distinctive three-part social order in New Orleans.

The European colonial system took approximately 11 million Africans to the Caribbean and North and South America as slaves.² This transatlantic slave trade had a profound impact on the evolution of New Orleans Voodoo. The colonial rulers, driven by interests defined in a distant metropolis, make crucial decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people. In this dynamic, the colonizers typically reject cultural compromises, viewing themselves as superior and believing in their mandate to rule.³ This practice began to take shape during the 18th and 19th centuries when enslaved Africans were brought to Louisiana. The soil around New

¹ Filan, Kenaz, *The New Orleans Voodoo Handbook*, Simon and Schuster, 2011, pp. 12-25.

² King, Russell, Richard, Black, *The Atlas of Human Migration: Global Patterns of People on the Move*, Earthscan, 2010, pp. 760-761.

³ Jürgen, Osterhammel, *Colonialism*. Markus Wiener Publishers, 2005, P. 15.

Orleans was fertile and the climate well suited for growing sugar, cotton, tobacco, and rice. The colony faced a serious labor shortage which led to the colonists importing African slaves. Most of the African captives were of Bantu and Kongo origin but two-thirds of the slaves brought to Louisiana before 1730 came from the Senegambian area of West Africa. These African slaves brought great agricultural knowledge and were able to cultivate new crops in New Orleans rich soil. Their ability to navigate the dangerous land including quicksand and hidden pitfalls as well as the swampy ecosystem, enabled New Orleans to become one of the busiest commercial ports in the area. Voodoo and other African spiritual practices served as a form of resistance and a means of survival for enslaved individuals during this time. It provided a sense of identity, community, and connection to ancestral roots, offering solace and empowerment in the face of the harsh conditions of slavery. Voodoo also played a role in building and sustaining community among the enslaved population.



Fig 1: New Orleans Louisiana, slave trade.

Their diverse spiritual traditions began to merge with elements of Catholicism and Native American beliefs. Enslaved Africans brought their diverse religious and spiritual beliefs with them to the New World, where their various religious practices began to merge and adapt. They introduced a broad spectrum of spiritual traditions, encompassing the reverence of ancestral spirits, faith in a broad range of deities, divination, and rituals that incorporated music, dance, and drumming. They also brought knowledge and culture, regarding rice cultivation making it the most successful crop in Louisiana, the bamboula dance and beat which has become associated with Mardi Gras, the Nkomo (okra) which later became an integral part of New Orleans Gumbo and the Malian melodies and scales, which

evolved into the Delta Blues. This shortage of labor in Louisiana encouraged the importation of slaves, and the shortage of eligible French women led to mixed marriages and a growing Mulatto population. These “free people of colour” developed a culture of their own, but also had dealings with both white and black society. They helped to establish the three-part social order (black, white, coloured) that became a hallmark of New Orleans and encouraged the cultural interchanges that later became New Orleans Voodoo.⁴



Fig 2: New Orleans Louisiana, slave trade.

It is evident New Orleans voodoo draws inspiration from African spirituality, given its African origins. Various aspects of this tradition bear resemblances to other African religions, such as the reverence for ancestors, the utilization of natural herbal remedies, and the incorporation of common mythological elements. Ancestral worship and the belief in the presence of spirits of the deceased were central to many African spiritual practices. In these traditions, ancestors were often considered as intermediaries between the living and the spirit world, serving as protectors, guides, and sources of wisdom. The living would pay homage to their ancestors through rituals, offerings, and prayers, seeking their blessings and guidance in daily life. As New Orleans Voodoo took shape, it retained and incorporated these fundamental elements from African spirituality, ensuring that the connection between the living and the deceased persisted as a core component of the belief system. By assimilating these key elements, the tradition continued to honor and maintain the spiritual connection between the living practitioners and their ancestral spirits, thereby shaping the character and

⁴Filan, Kenaz, *'The New Orleans Voodoo Handbook'*, Simon and Schuster, 2011, pp.12-25.

essence of New Orleans Voodoo as a distinctive and culturally rich spiritual practice. The concept of the Constitutive Other, adds another layer of understanding to this dynamic, highlighting the relationship between the essential nature (personality) and the physical body (person) of a human being. The Constitutive Other introduces a nuanced perspective, emphasizing the inner difference that exists within the Self and contributing to the complexity of the spiritual practices within the context of New Orleans Voodoo.⁵

Enslaved Africans also carried with them a profound understanding of various herbs and their therapeutic properties; much of this knowledge deeply rooted in their native African traditions. There is a belief that herbs, as natural products, are inherently safe without side effects and that efficacy can be obtained over a wide range of doses.⁶ This extensive herbal knowledge had a lasting and profound impact on the use of herbs and plants within the context of New Orleans Voodoo, notably in the practice known as hoodoo. Hoodoo is defined as *African American folk magic practiced predominantly in the southeastern United States through rituals of protection, herbal medicine, charming of objects, and ancestor veneration.*⁷ Hoodoo practitioners harnessed the healing properties of herbs not only for physical well-being but also for spiritual protection, divination, and spell work. The integration of African herbal knowledge into New Orleans Voodoo and Hoodoo demonstrates the resilience of African cultural practices in the face of colonialism. It highlights how enslaved Africans brought with them a rich and valuable heritage that not only survived but thrived in the New World, leaving a lasting impact on the spiritual and healing traditions.



Fig 3: New Orleans market, herbal medicine.

⁵ Georg, Wilhelm, Friedrich Hegel, '*Phenomenology of Spirit*', Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, pp. 8–9.

⁶ Benzie, Iris F. F, et al, '*Herbal Medicine: Biomolecular and Clinical Aspects*'. CRC Press, 2011, pp. 4-25.

⁷ Dictionary.com, "*Dictionary.com*", Dictionary.com, 2018. www.dictionary.com.

Elements of African Cosmology and Mythology also had a profound impact on the world's view of the belief systems of New Orleans Voodoo practitioners. Cosmology is a branch of Astronomy focusing on the origin and evolution of the universe, from the Big Bang to today and on into the future.⁸ These aspects of African spirituality provided a framework for understanding the spiritual dimensions of the world and the interplay of forces that influenced both the natural and supernatural realms. Within this cosmological framework, the natural world is seen as interconnected with the spiritual world, with the forces of nature and the spirit realm intricately linked. Elements like the worship of ancestral spirits, belief in deities associated with specific natural phenomena, and the recognition of a spiritual realm parallel to the physical one, were integrated into the belief systems of New Orleans Voodoo. This highlights the resilience of enslaved Africans who, while facing unimaginable hardships, managed to create a new spiritual tradition that merged their ancestral knowledge with the challenges of their new environment. This fusion of cultures and beliefs not only survived but also thrived, leaving a lasting cultural legacy that continues to influence the spiritual and cultural landscape of New Orleans.

This spiritual tradition is a prime example of how diverse cultures and belief systems came into contact, interacted, and merged to create a unique and syncretic culture. *Syncretic is the combining or bringing together different philosophical, religious, or cultural principles and practices.*⁹ Enslaved Africans were exposed to Catholicism through the conversion efforts of their European enslavers. In response to external influences and changing cultural landscapes, Voodoo practitioners demonstrated adaptability by incorporating elements of Catholicism into their existing spiritual beliefs. This syncretic approach allowed them to preserve essential elements of their traditional practices, while appearing to conform to the religious expectations of those in power. The uniqueness of New Orleans Voodoo extends far beyond this fusion of African and Catholic influences. It harmoniously incorporates a rich tapestry of magical practices derived from African, Native American, and European sources, resulting in a spiritual system of remarkable depth and versatility. It combines magical practices including

⁸Nola, Taylor, Redd, "What Is Cosmology? Definition & History", Space.com, Space, 2017, www.space.com/16042-cosmology.html.

⁹Dictionary.com, "*Dictionary.com*", Dictionary.com, 2018, www.dictionary.com.

sympathetic magic, herbalism, and rituals from various cultures. The practitioners, by embracing this fusion, demonstrated a dynamic and flexible response to external forces while simultaneously retaining the core essence of their spiritual heritage. The incorporation of Catholic elements into Voodoo displays the resilience of the tradition, as it evolves and adapts to the ever-changing cultural and social context in which it exists.

What sets New Orleans Voodoo apart is the enduring presence of the African cultural spirit that courses through its veins. The vibrant traditions of music, drumming, dance, and rituals, integral to African culture, seamlessly intertwine with the religious practices in New Orleans Voodoo. These elements go beyond mere decoration, they form essential components that infuse vitality into ceremonies and directly connect to the rich cultural heritage of Africa. These elements have been adeptly incorporated into Voodoo ceremonies, establishing a direct link to the cultural expressions of Africa. New Orleans Voodoo stands as an exceptional testament to the amalgamation of cultures, crafting something new while preserving the past. It exemplifies how people can adapt and evolve, even in challenging times, giving rise to a distinctive spiritual tradition. In the face of adversity, New Orleans Voodoo emerges as a distinctive spiritual tradition that not only withstands the test of time but also thrives as a living testament to the dynamic interplay of cultural influences, forming a unique and vibrant tapestry of spiritual practices.

Voodoo Queens and Priestesses played a pivotal and influential role in the origin and development of New Orleans Voodoo. Voodoo Queens and Priestesses were key figures in preserving, transmitting, and shaping the religious and spiritual aspects of this syncretic tradition. They were often seen as intermediaries between the human realm and the spirit world, guiding their followers in religious and magical practices acting as conduits for spiritual wisdom. They were responsible for conducting and leading significant religious ceremonies and rituals. Their knowledge of herbal remedies and magical practices rendered them invaluable in addressing diverse needs and challenges. These leaders frequently passed on the oral tradition of New Orleans Voodoo, imparting the songs, prayers, and rituals associated with this tradition. In the context of slavery, Voodoo Queens and Priestesses provided a source of empowerment and resistance. They provided

enslaved individuals with a means to assert their cultural identity in the face of oppression, offering a sanctuary for the preservation of African spiritual practices. By resisting the dehumanization of slavery through their spiritual leadership, Voodoo Queens and Priestesses became beacons of strength, resilience, and cultural continuity, shaping the unique narrative of New Orleans Voodoo within the complex historical backdrop of the region.

This chapter has delved into the intricate and fascinating origins of New Orleans Voodoo, highlighting its unique development within the historical context of the transatlantic slave trade. New Orleans Voodoo has emerged as a syncretic spiritual tradition that harmoniously blends elements from African, European, and Native American religious practices. The transatlantic slave trade played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of New Orleans Voodoo, as enslaved Africans brought with them a rich tapestry of cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and profound herbal knowledge. Against the backdrop of harsh and oppressive conditions, Voodoo emerged as a form of resistance and a means of survival, providing enslaved individuals with a sense of identity, community, and connection to ancestral roots. New Orleans Voodoo serves as a testament to the enduring resilience and adaptability of enslaved Africans, highlighting their ability to innovate while preserving their cultural heritage in the face of formidable challenges. This chapter has laid the foundation for a deeper exploration of New Orleans Voodoo, revealing its multifaceted origins and the profound impact of cultural, spiritual, and historical forces that have shaped this distinctive tradition.

Chapter 2

Shadows and Stereotypes - Mainstream representations and their repercussions on New Orleans Voodoo.

The depiction of New Orleans Voodoo in mainstream media is frequently characterized by inaccuracies, contributing to the perpetuation of stereotypes and misconceptions with significant repercussions. This chapter delves into the ways in which mass media has negligently portrayed New Orleans Voodoo and examines how mainstream representation capitalizes on these inaccuracies. A substantial role is played in reinforcing these inaccuracies across various media platforms such as television, film, literature, and video games. From Hollywood horror films to hyper-realistic video games, New Orleans Voodoo is often presented as a sinister and malevolent force. These distorted portrayals not only misguide the public but also carry substantial consequences for Voodoo practitioners and the communities within New Orleans. Directors employ techniques such as imagery, symbolism, racial diversity, motivated lighting, and real-life inspirations to craft an eerie atmosphere surrounding Voodoo. By addressing the impact of these misrepresentations, the objective of this thesis is to foster a more accurate understanding of this culturally rich and complex tradition and challenge the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. This involves an analysis of the representations of this spiritual tradition in a selection of films, television series, and video games, including titles such as 'American Horror Story: Coven'¹⁰, 'Spell'¹¹, 'The Craft'¹², 'I Walked with a Zombie',¹³ and 'Resident Evil 7'¹⁴.

In the initial part of this chapter, the media's frequent misrepresentation of well-known Voodoo practitioners and the reasons behind these inaccuracies will be examined. An illustrative example of this contemporary portrayal is evident in 'American Horror Story: Coven,' particularly in its depiction of New Orleans Voodoo. The series presents a negative portrayal of this religious practice, incorporating various characters embodying renowned figures from the world of Voodoo. While

¹⁰ Murphy, Ryan, Brad, Falchuk, '*American Horror Story Coven*', 20th Century Fox Television, 2014.

¹¹ Tonderai, Mark, '*Spell*', Paramount Pictures, 2020, DVD.

¹² Filardi, Peter, '*The Craft*', Columbia Pictures, 1996, DVD.

¹³ Tourneur, Jacques, '*I Walked with A Zombie*', Rko Pictures, 1943, DVD.

¹⁴ Nakanishi, Koshi, '*Resident Evil 7*', Capcom, 2017.

some characters in the series offer accurate representations of their real-life counterparts, the narrative introduces numerous inaccuracies and embellishments for dramatic effect. However, Angela Bassett's portrayal of Marie Laveau in 'American Horror Story,' stands out as one of the most faithful character representations. The writers meticulously adhere to the core values and essence associated with Laveau's historical persona. Marie Laveau was a dedicated practitioner of Voodoo, healer, herbalist, and entrepreneur. Laveau was also known as a prominent female religious leader and community activist.¹⁵ Throughout the series, an African American character uses their efforts to guide a more privileged, white character to their goals. She gave her life to the cause helping her community at the expense of her own pursuits.



Fig 4: Angela Bassett's, Marie Laveau, 'American Horror Story, Coven'.

The recurring theme of sacrifice, as depicted in characters such as Dick Halloran in 'The Shining' and Jezelle Gay Hartman in 'Jeepers Creepers,' emphasizes a widespread theme commonly found in the horror genre. Marie Laveau exemplifies this by dedicating her life to the cause of helping her community at the expense of her personal pursuits. Her focus was to protect her community and seek revenge against those who dared to threaten it, which led to her often being painted as a villain, but her moral compass ultimately leaned towards keeping her community safe. The portrayal of these characters reflects the diversity within the Black community, displaying individuals with varied motivations and sources of power. They do not always wield their power for malevolent purposes, challenging

¹⁵Carolyn, Morrow, Long, 'A New Orleans Voodoo Priestess', University Press of Florida, 2007, pp. 166-170.

stereotypes and offering a nuanced representation. This complex narrative serves as a reflection of the diverse identities and potentials that black individuals encompass, providing a valuable and needed perspective in media portrayal.

Additional characters featured in the series serve to underscore the pervasive racism experienced by African Americans during this historical period and the extent of white dominance over the spiritual practices of this community. Madame Delphine LaLaurie Played by Kathy Bates depicts an accurate portrayal of the murderous socialite. It can be argued that LaLaurie, in a chilling manner, reserved slaves exclusively for the purpose of subjecting them to torture - a perverse activity that can be considered a disturbing hobby. This heinous conduct not only violated moral standards but also shattered her once-established reputation as a sweet, sophisticated Creole woman.¹⁶ After a fire broke out in her family home, one room contained several slaves that had been gruesomely tortured in numerous ways, some of which died after being rescued. When word got out about the abuse of her slaves, a mob formed and caused further damage to the house. This incident serves as a poignant testament to the strength and unity of the African American community in New Orleans as they rallied together in pursuit of freedom and protection.

Other characters within the 'American Horror Story' series play integral roles representing New Orleans Voodoo culture such as Papa Legba, the Voodoo God along with the infamous serial killer, the Axeman of New Orleans. Their portrayals are significantly fictionalized, factually inaccurate, or exaggerated to intensify the narrative impact. The show depicts Papa Legba as a mysterious Voodoo god that is out for your soul. In reality, he is a figure in Haitian Vodou and Louisiana Voodoo, called the Loa. He acts as intermediaries between humanity and Bondye, or the "Good God." This God is normally depicted as an old man with a cane, smoking a pipe that offers aid to those who seek an alternative path or solution. Although he is also known to be a trickster, it is wise to be wary of him. This exaggeration highlights a general inclination to sensationalize elements of the culture to enhance narrative impact. Upon contemplation of these character depictions, it becomes apparent

¹⁶ Rehlaender, Sophie A, "*The Radical Impact of Madame Delphine Lalaurie on Slavery and the Image of African Americans, 1831-1840*", Portland State University, 2019, pp. 4-9.

that the series, while offering entertainment, necessitates a thorough scrutiny of its historical and cultural portrayals.



Fig 5: Lance Reddick's, Papa Legba, 'American Horror Story, Coven'.

Rochelle, portrayed by Rachel True in Peter Filardi's 'The Craft,' and Eloise, played by Loretta Devine in Mark Tonderai's 'Spell,' demonstrates additional instances of Voodoo practitioners depicted as malevolent figures driven by a thirst for revenge. Both characters inflict harm on others for personal benefits, with little regard for the consequences they impose on those they harm. Rochelle is a Black, witchy Catholic with hypnotic powers. Her decisions are spurred by relentless harassment from a schoolmate who directs hurtful comments toward her textured hair and skin. As she grapples with her racial identity, her choices reflect a desire for power and control over her circumstance thus emphasizing the cultural connection between Catholicism and Witchcraft. The natural element associated with each character is revealed, thus depicting Rochelle's original element as water, which represents "the power of intuition" in the film. The film underscores the dichotomy between dark and light, serving as a metaphor for racial divisions within the realm of this religious practice, utilizing characters, narratives, and experiences.¹⁷

'Spells' Eloise is a traditional Hoodoo practitioner who heals Marquis after his plane crashes in the area, while also harboring far more menacing plans for him. The film incorporates elements of root work drawing from Hoodoo culture by highlighting the use of natural herbs as a primary form of medicine. Eloise can restore sight and voice using these boogities, which are dolls similar to what we know as Voodoo dolls. Both Rochelle and Eloise employ their supernatural abilities for selfish ends while still

¹⁷ Kapitan, Alex, "Dark and Light: Practicing Balance—and Countering Racism—in Metaphors." Radical Copyeditor, 2020, radicalcopyeditor.com/2020/12/21/dark-and-light/.

believing that their actions serve the greater good of their respective communities. The directors employ motivated lighting techniques, using dark and eerie lighting to symbolize the danger associated with these characters.¹⁸ The malevolent depiction of Voodoo practitioners in these films contributes to a more emotionally charged narrative, primarily benefiting the audience's engagement rather than offering factually accurate representations to spread knowledge about the religion.

The elements of race, magic and religion explored in Jacques Tourneur's 'I Walked with a Zombie' and 'American Horror Story, Coven' also contributed to shaping a more unfavorable perception of the spiritual practice among audiences. Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk present two conflicting and racially divided modes of magic with the predominantly white coven who are descendants of the Salem witches and the African American Voodooists, led by the most infamous Voodoo queen, Marie Laveau.¹⁹ The directors utilize cinematic lighting techniques to emphasize the depiction of these groups as sworn adversaries competing for power in New Orleans since the coven's arrival.²⁰ In the end, a truce was established, delineating the city into distinct areas where white and black practitioners could independently wield their magic.

'Coven' underscores the racially and physically segregated nature of magic within the city. It also draws on racialized stereotypes of the primitive and the savage to present voodoo as dark and dangerous. Yet, primarily through the figure of Marie Laveau, it will also argue that Murphy and Falchuk depict Voodoo as a symbol of resistance to racialized and gendered violence and oppression, and that in many ways Coven grants agency to Voodoo women.²¹ The lighting choices contribute to the overall atmosphere and mood, deepening the tension that define the relationship between these magical factions. Shadows, contrasts, and nuanced

¹⁸ DeGuzman, Kyle, "WATCH: Roger Deakins' Motivated Lighting Techniques." StudioBinder, 2021, www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-motivated-lighting-in-film/.

¹⁹ Somers, Dale A, "Black and White in New Orleans: A Study in Urban Race Relations, 1865-1900." *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 40, no. 1, 1974, pp. 19-42.

²⁰ Merkt, Martin, Florian, Sochatzy. "Becoming Aware of Cinematic Techniques in Propaganda: Instructional Support by Cueing and Training", *Learning and Instruction*, vol. 39, 2015, pp. 55-71.

²¹ "I Walked with a Zombie." Wikipedia, 2022, simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Walked_with_a_Zombie.

plays of light further emphasize the racial and magical divide, heightening the audience's awareness of the established conflicts within the narrative. The directors use cinematic lighting not only as a technical element but as a storytelling device that amplifies the visual impact of the adversarial dynamics between these distinct groups in the mystical landscape of New Orleans.

Historian and author Alexander Nemerov asserted that *I Walked with a Zombie* uses stillness as a metaphor for slavery.²² The characters within the film, personify a connection between slavery and the concept of zombies, which has emerged as a symbol strongly associated with Voodoo practitioners. Anthropologist Wade Davis states zombie's do not speak, cannot fend for themselves, do not even know their names. Their fate is enslavement, which serves as a poignant reflection of the powerlessness experienced by African Americans in the historical context of the film.²³ Nemerov further contends that the character Carrefour symbolizes the dual nature of strength and victimization, particularly in the backdrop of the rise of Black power during World War II. He expressed disappointment that the film's original theme, which he believed attempted to provide a more sensitive commentary, was altered to focus on the "enslavement" of Jessica, a white woman, who was portrayed as either a zombie or in a catatonic state. This shift was troubling to him as it shifted the focus from the suffering of the Black population on the island to the plight of a white woman. 'I Walked with a Zombie' not only presents these beliefs with accuracy and sensitivity but also delves into the manipulation of these beliefs by white individuals to exert further control over the island's residents. This reveals the prevailing significance of white women over African American citizens during this period and highlights how films, since the 1940s, have perpetuated this skewed perspective. The film thus becomes a lens through which the historical power dynamics and racial hierarchies of the time are reflected and examined.

The utilization of imagery within media creates a misleading and malevolent representation of New Orleans Voodoo, enhancing the storytelling with a more immersive and evocative narrative. The popular video game series 'Resident Evil 7'

²² Nemerov, Alexander, *Icons of Grief*, Univ of California Press, 2005, p.103.

²³ Bang, Larsen, Lars, "Zombies of Immaterial Labor: The Modern Monster and the Death of Death - Journal #15." *Www.e-Flux.com*, 2010, www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61295/zombies-of-immaterial-labor-the-modern-monster-and-the-death-of-death/.

and Mark Tonderai's film, 'Spell', are perfect examples of how they created an evil perception of this practice using imagery and symbolism²⁴. The Boogity doll plays a pivotal role in the movie 'Spell' and serves as a substitute for a Voodoo doll. The doll is used to drain Marquis' essence to prolong Eloise's life. Using Marquis' hair, flesh, blood and semen, Eloise created a doll that gains life. The Boogity is Marquis' avatar, a real-life representation, which is why she needs him to heal. Once he is back to full-strength, the doll will be fully powered. The doll can be used to harm its human and the person who makes the doll is the master.



Fig 6: Boogity doll, 'Spell'.

Similarly in Resident Evil 7, A Voodoo doll can be found in one of the rooms of the house at the beginning of the game. While various forms of media have incorporated Voodoo dolls into their narratives over the years, there is no historical record of these dolls being employed in actual Voodoo practices. This discrepancy serves as further proof of the media's inclination to portray the religion inaccurately while striving to create a captivating and immersive storyline. Using sensationalized elements such as Voodoo dolls, the media continues to propagate misleading stereotypes, contributing to a distorted public perception of New Orleans Voodoo. The cumulative effect of sensationalized portrayals can shape the way people perceive the religion, fostering misconceptions and reinforcing inaccurate stereotypes.

²⁴Teale, Failla, 'Beyond Symbolism: Film, Art, Culture', Phd Cultural Studies & Film Graduate School of Literatures, Languages, And Cultures University of Edinburgh, 2004, p.7.



Fig 7: Voodoo doll, 'Resident Evil 7'.

In conclusion, the portrayal of New Orleans Voodoo in mass media has been marred by inaccuracies that perpetuate stereotypes and misconceptions, carrying significant repercussions. This chapter has examined the ways in which mass media has misrepresented New Orleans Voodoo, illustrating how mainstream representation benefits from these inaccuracies. The pervasive depiction of New Orleans Voodoo as a sinister and malevolent force has not only misled the public but also resulted in tangible repercussions for Voodoo practitioners and the communities within New Orleans. The characters and storylines analyzed in this chapter underscore the racial tensions and power dynamics prevalent during the times in which these narratives are set. Directors and creators employ a range of techniques, including imagery, symbolism, racial diversity, motivated lighting, and real-life inspirations, to craft an eerie atmosphere surrounding Voodoo. This deliberate crafting often sacrifices accuracy for sensational impact, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and perpetuating a distorted understanding of this culturally rich and complex tradition. The enduring presence of inaccuracies, fueled by sensationalized elements such as Voodoo dolls, strengthens damaging stereotypes, influences public perception and nurtures misconceptions. This chapter emphasizes the necessity of critically examining media representations, urging for a more precise comprehension of New Orleans Voodoo, and actively contesting the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes within the broader cultural conversation.

Chapter 3

Between Essence and Misinterpretation - Cultural acceptance and exploitation of Voodoo in New Orleans.

At the heart of New Orleans cultural mosaic lies Voodoo, a religion intertwined with the city's identity yet often misrepresented in popular media as previously discussed. This chapter delves into the various effects the inaccurate depictions of Voodoo had on the community, aiming to highlight the distinct impacts, both positive and negative on New Orleans' cultural landscape. The economic, cultural, and social advantages resulting from these misinterpretations become evident when observing how the community has adjusted to capitalize on the fascination surrounding this misunderstood religion. The impact of Voodoo on the wider cultural identity of New Orleans is significant to the city's economy. Through examining its influences on art, music, architecture, and traditions, it is evident Voodoo has shaped the cultural tapestry of the city. The emergence of new traditions and festivals that have been inspired by or invented through the practice of Voodoo have become cultural celebrations, that not only highlight the city's vibrant diversity but also reflect the creative adaptation and evolution of cultural practices. The balance between cultural acceptance and exploitation of Voodoo within the community has led to financial gain with a massive boost in the tourism industry for New Orleans. The misinterpretation of Voodoo has led to both cultural acceptances, creating a sense of cultural pride and awareness, and exploitation, potentially perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions.

Voodoo serves as a significant cultural identity within New Orleans, fostering a sense of inclusivity and diversity within the community. Its significance lies not only in its spiritual aspects but also in its role as a symbol of resilience and adaptability displayed by the locals.²⁵ Within this vibrant city, residents have uniquely formed a complex tapestry of diverse traditions, embodying a unique cultural blend that is distinct to New Orleans. The significance of Voodoo

²⁵ Hart, Danae, Marie, 'Creole Resistance in Louisiana from Colonization to Black Lives Matter: Activism's Deep-Rooted Role in Creole Identity', CGU Theses & Dissertations, 2020, pp.156-165.

extends beyond personal beliefs, playing a crucial role in connecting residents to their roots and heritage. Efforts to dispel misconceptions and promote accurate information about Voodoo have proven crucial in nurturing a deeper appreciation for the cultural legacy of the city. These actions fortify the connection between the community and their roots, grounding them in a profound understanding of their heritage.

The commercialization and misinterpretation of Voodoo, particularly in popular media and tourist attractions, risk diluting the authenticity of its practices. This conflict between genuine cultural expressions and their misrepresented portrayals makes it difficult to preserve and maintain genuine admiration for the essence of Voodoo. Despite these challenges, the presence of Voodoo instills a sense of pride among locals, encouraging them to share their unique heritage, stories, and knowledge with a broader audience. This sharing contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural richness inherent in New Orleans.²⁶ By proudly embracing and educating others about their traditions, residents play a vital role in dispelling stereotypes and ensuring that the true essence of Voodoo is preserved and celebrated. In doing so, they contribute to the continued vibrancy and authenticity of New Orleans' cultural landscape.

Cultural tourism in New Orleans is significantly influenced by the sensationalized portrayal of Voodoo, drawing visitors fascinated by the ambiguous allure surrounding this practice.²⁷ Voodoo stands as a vibrant thread woven into the city's rich cultural tapestry, evident through the presence of specialized museums and shops offering artifacts and relics associated with the spiritual practice. Guided tours delve into the history and rituals of Voodoo, catering to the curiosity of visitors keen on unraveling its true purpose. These tours delve into the spiritual beliefs, ceremonies, and cultural impact of Voodoo, enriching the understanding of its profound influence on New Orleans' identity. The growing interest in Voodoo extends beyond tours and museums, fueling a market for an array of merchandise ranging from charms, artwork,

²⁶ Massey, Patrick, 'New Orleans Exceptionalism in The Cultural Response to Hurricane Katrina', The University of Manchester, 2018, pp.17-19.

²⁷ Jones, Makailyn, 'At the Crossroads: An Exploration of New Orleans Vodou, Disaster, And Literary Anthropology', Princeton University, 2022.

clothing, and souvenirs to potions and books. This potential market has provided economic opportunities for local artisans and entrepreneurs who craft and sell these items, contributing to the city's economy. The influence of Voodoo permeates beyond tourist attractions into the realms of hospitality. Restaurants, bars, and hotels infuse Voodoo themes into their ambiance, menus, and entertainment offerings. This immersive approach caters to visitors seeking an authentic and unique experience, thereby enhancing the allure of cultural tourism in New Orleans.



Fig 8: New Orleans Louisiana, Voodoo merchandise store.

The integration of Voodoo into various facets of the city's tourism not only entices visitors but also sustains a thriving economy while enriching the exploration of New Orleans' cultural heritage. This symbiotic relationship between the allure of Voodoo and cultural tourism creates a captivating and enriching experience for those exploring New Orleans, offering them a glimpse into the city's vibrant heritage. It fosters economic opportunities within the local community, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between cultural fascination and economic sustainability. The incorporation of Voodoo into the tourism industry serves as a bridge between the city's rich cultural legacy and the eager curiosity of those who visit, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship.

Voodoo has indelibly shaped the cultural landscape of New Orleans through a series of vibrant festivals and events held throughout the year. Among these, the Voodoo Music + Arts Experience²⁸ stands as a prime example, not merely a

²⁸“Voodoo Music + Arts Experience.” *Www.voodooofestival.com*, www.voodooofestival.com/.

music festival but a celebration that intricately weaves elements of Voodoo culture into its fabric.²⁹ These events require precise event management services, staffing, security, and vendor support, offering an abundance of temporary employment opportunities for locals. Roles spanning from event organizers to stagehands and security personnel stimulate the local job market, enhancing the city's economic dynamics. These festivals serve as platforms for musicians, artists, performers, and cultural practitioners to showcase their talents, infusing the events with a diverse array of artistic expressions. The allure of such festivals also attracts sponsors and partners seeking to align their brands with the event's themes, thereby contributing to the event's success and reaching a broader audience.

Beyond their economic impact, festivals celebrating Voodoo, foster a sense of community pride and engagement, serving as a cultural event that unite residents and visitors alike in celebration and appreciation of New Orleans' rich culture. Despite all the economic advantages of these events, the festivals can also potentially have negative effects withing the New Orleans culture and reputation. Despite efforts to showcase the genuine essence of Voodoo, festivals might inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes or misunderstandings about the religion. Festivals with a heavy commercial focus might prioritize profit over authenticity. This can result in a diluted representation of Voodoo traditions, as aspects are exaggerated or altered for entertainment or commercial purposes, potentially misinforming attendees.

Voodoo and its misrepresentations have significantly influenced the artistic expressions seen in the vibrant canvas of the New Orleans' art and film scene. The mystique and intrigue surrounding Voodoo practices have served as a source of inspiration for local artists and filmmakers. Some artworks authentically delve into the spiritual depth and cultural significance of Voodoo, aiming to honor its traditions and heritage. These pieces often reflect meticulous research and genuine efforts to portray Voodoo with respect and accuracy. Misrepresentations perpetuated by popular media have also seeped

²⁹Yoshida, Kenji, '*The Museum and The Intangible Cultural Heritage*', Periodical Issue, Unesdoc Digital Library, 2004, pp.124-127.

into artistic expressions, leading to exaggerated, sensational, and sometimes inaccurate depictions of Voodoo. Films, paintings, sculptures, and mixed media often veer into the realm of mystique, tapping into the fascination surrounding Voodoo's perceived darker or more sensational aspects.

The misinterpretation of Voodoo, though at times leading to stereotypical portrayals, has nonetheless left an indelible imprint on the artistic narrative of New Orleans, creating an artistic discussion expressing both reality and myth, tradition and sensationalism. This juxtaposition has sparked a continuous and evolving conversation within the city's creative circles. Genuine efforts by artists and filmmakers to authentically delve into Voodoo's cultural roots have resulted in thought-provoking works that seek to honor and understand its traditions.³⁰ These authentic explorations serve as a counterbalance to the sensationalized depictions, offering a more nuanced and respectful portrayal of Voodoo's spiritual and cultural dimensions. The artistic expressions inspired by Voodoo in New Orleans contribute to a multifaceted narrative, bridging the gap between tradition and contemporary perspectives, reality and imagination.

Voodoo's influence on New Orleans extends beyond spirituality and culture, leaving an indelible mark on the city's architecture. Within homes and certain neighborhoods, practitioners craft sacred spaces and altars dedicated to their spiritual practices, impacting the interior design within the community. These spaces often possess specific architectural characteristics and design elements that reflect the cultural significance and beliefs intertwined with Voodoo. Altars have a structured arrangement of objects and symbolic elements. These arrangements are carefully organized, often featuring candles, religious icons, ritualistic tools, sacred symbols, statues representing deities or spirits, and offerings such as food, flowers, or herbs.

³⁰ DuBois, Ethan, *'Banksy's Exit Through the Gift Shop: Street Art and Our Quest for Authenticity'*, Boston University, 2011, p.8.

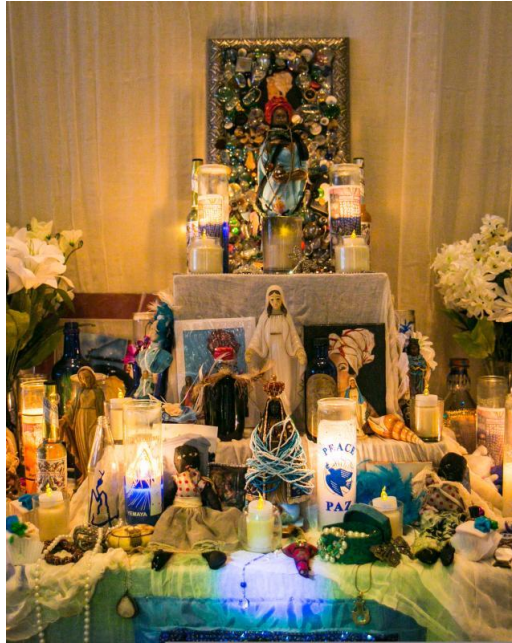


Fig 9: New Orleans, Louisiana, public Voodoo altar.

Colours also hold symbolic importance in Voodoo. Altars might feature specific colours or fabrics that correspond to different spirits or energies within the practice. Red, white, blue, and green are among the colours frequently utilized, each carrying its own spiritual significance. Voodoo-inspired artwork, sculptures, and decorative elements find their way into buildings and public spaces, enriching the city's artistic landscape with their cultural allure. Efforts to preserve and honor Voodoo traditions are prominent in certain buildings or sites that hold historical or spiritual importance to practitioners, highlighting the deep-rooted connection between Voodoo and the architectural heritage of New Orleans. These areas stand as concrete representations of the cultural depth and spiritual heritage, intricately integrating Voodoo into the essence of the city's architectural identity.

This chapter has unraveled the various effects of the misinterpretations surrounding Voodoo, illuminating both its positive contributions and the challenges it presents within the city's cultural landscape. The economic, cultural, and social advantages arising from these misconceptions are evident in the community's ability to leverage the interest surrounding this often-misunderstood religion. Voodoo's imprint on New Orleans is undeniable, manifesting in art, music, architecture, and the vibrant traditions and festivals

that have been inspired by or emerged from its practice. Alongside these enriching influences, the misrepresentations have perpetuated stereotypes and misunderstandings, risking the dilution and exploitation of Voodoo. This has highlighted Voodoo's role in creating a sense of cultural pride and awareness among locals, prompting them to share their heritage and stories, contributing to a deeper understanding of the city's rich diversity. Cultural tourism in New Orleans has been significantly influenced by the allure of Voodoo, shaping a thriving industry that integrates this mystique into various aspects of the city's tourist attractions. The chapter serves as a comprehensive exploration of the intricate interplay between the positive and challenging aspects of Voodoo's influence on New Orleans. It highlights the need for a thoughtful and respectful approach to safeguard the authenticity of Voodoo, ensuring that its rich cultural legacy continues to thrive amidst the dynamic landscape of the city.

Conclusion

Embracing Complexity - New Orleans Voodoo as a testament to resilience and cultural continuity.

In the rich and vibrant tapestry of New Orleans' cultural and spiritual history, the origins of Voodoo emerge as an indelible testament to the enduring resilience and adaptability of enslaved Africans during the tumultuous era of the transatlantic slave trade. This free-form system of worship, born amidst the crucible of oppression, not only became an integral part of the city's cultural landscape but also left an indelible mark on the art, music, and mystique that define New Orleans. The living pulse of the city seems to resonate with the myths and legends it withholds, breathing life into the spiritual practices that have thrived against the odds. To comprehend the true purpose and value of New Orleans Voodoo, this thesis embarked on a journey delving into its unique origins. At the heart of its foundation lies a mosaic of characteristics – African roots, Syncretism, Catholic influence, Iwa, Hoodoo, Voodoo Queens, and Priestesses. The richness of New Orleans Voodoo lies not merely in its adherence to tradition, but in its ability to dynamically adapt, weaving together diverse cultural elements into a cohesive and meaningful spiritual practice.

Against the grim backdrop of oppressive conditions, New Orleans Voodoo emerged as more than a system of belief; it became a form of resistance, a lifeline for survival. In the shackles of slavery, it provided solace, empowerment, and a profound connection to ancestral roots. The transatlantic slave trade, with its dehumanizing magnitude, played a pivotal role in shaping New Orleans Voodoo. The importation of African slaves to Louisiana, driven by the demands of a burgeoning colonial economy, brought forth a confluence of diverse spiritual traditions. Ancestral worship, herbal remedies, and the intricate tapestry of African Cosmology found a home in New Orleans Voodoo. The spiritual connection between the living and the deceased, accentuated by the concept of the Constitutive Other, added layers of complexity to the practice, unveiling the inner differences within the Self. A profound understanding of herbs and their therapeutic properties, rooted in African traditions, breathed life into the practice of Hoodoo. This fusion of herbal knowledge not only

contributed to physical well-being but also became a cornerstone for spiritual protection, divination, and spell work. The integration of African herbal wisdom into New Orleans Voodoo highlighted the resilience of cultural practices in the face of adversity.

African Cosmology and Mythology, intertwined with the worldview of New Orleans Voodoo practitioners, framed a spiritual narrative that bridged the natural and supernatural realms. This fusion of cultures and beliefs, surviving and thriving amidst unimaginable hardships, left an enduring cultural legacy. The syncretic nature of New Orleans Voodoo, blending elements from African, Native American, and European sources, exemplifies adaptability in the face of changing cultural landscapes. Central to the unique identity of New Orleans Voodoo is the enduring presence of the African cultural spirit. Music, drumming, dance, and rituals form not just embellishments but essential components that infuse vitality into ceremonies, establishing a direct link to the cultural expressions of Africa. This tradition stands as a testament to the resilience of a people who, in the face of adversity, crafted something new while preserving the echoes of the past. The pivotal role of Voodoo Queens and Priestesses cannot be overstated. As intermediaries between the human and spirit realms, they became beacons of strength, cultural continuity, and resistance during the era of slavery. In passing on the oral tradition, conducting significant ceremonies, and providing guidance, they shaped the unique narrative of New Orleans Voodoo within the complex historical backdrop of the region.

This exploration of the intricate origins of New Orleans Voodoo unveils not just a spiritual practice but a living testament to the dynamic interplay of cultural influences. As we pull back the veil that shrouds the mystique of New Orleans Voodoo, we are confronted with a tradition that beckons us to appreciate the profound power of cultural synthesis. It displays the transformative potential that arises when diverse cultural threads are woven together, creating something entirely new and uniquely resilient. From the crucible of slavery emerged a tradition that withstood the test of time, becoming a vibrant tapestry of spiritual practices that continue to shape the cultural landscape of New Orleans. As we unravel the veil that shrouds its mystique, New Orleans Voodoo

beckons us to appreciate not only the endurance of the human spirit but also the power of cultural synthesis to transcend the darkest chapters of history.

In the height of this exploration, it becomes evident that the portrayal of New Orleans Voodoo in mainstream media is filled with inaccuracies, giving rise to a perpetuation of stereotypes and misconceptions that reverberate with significant repercussions. The second chapter meticulously dissects the negligent portrayal of New Orleans Voodoo, laying bare the ways in which mass media capitalizes on these inaccuracies across various platforms, including television, film, literature, and video games. From the ominous landscapes of Hollywood horror films to the hyper-realistic realms of video games, New Orleans Voodoo is frequently cast as a sinister and malevolent force, perpetuating harmful stereotypes that extend far beyond the realms of entertainment. The impact of these distorted representations extends beyond the screen, infiltrating public perception and shaping misguided beliefs about this culturally rich and intricate tradition. The examination of specific titles, including 'American Horror Story: Coven', 'Spell', 'The Craft', 'I Walked with a Zombie', and 'Resident Evil 7', provides a nuanced understanding of how characters and narratives are often manipulated for dramatic effect. The misrepresentation of well-known Voodoo practitioners, such as Marie Laveau, and the fictionalization of historical events underscore the prevalence of sensationalism over accuracy in media portrayals.

In 'American Horror Story: Coven', the character Marie Laveau emerges as a beacon of accurate representation amid a landscape of embellishments. The portrayal of well-known Voodoo figures such as Papa Legba is significantly fictionalized, contributing to the general inclination to sensationalize elements of the culture for narrative impact. 'I Walked with a Zombie' delves into the historical context of racial hierarchies and power dynamics, utilizing imagery to reflect and examine the prevailing attitudes of the time. The film also falls prey to altering its original theme, focusing on the predicament of a white woman rather than delving into the suffering of the Black population on the island, thereby perpetuating skewed perspectives.

This thesis further explores how elements of race, magic, and religion contribute to the unfavorable perception of New Orleans Voodoo in titles like 'Coven'. Cinematic lighting techniques are employed not just as technical elements but as storytelling devices that deepen the racial and magical divides within the narrative, intensifying the audience's awareness of the established conflicts. The concluding insight reinforces the urgent need for a critical examination of media representations of New Orleans Voodoo. It underscores the detrimental impact of perpetuating harmful stereotypes and calls for a more accurate, nuanced, and respectful portrayal of this culturally rich and complex tradition within the broader cultural conversation. By unravelling the layers of misrepresentation, this thesis aims to pave the way for a more informed understanding of New Orleans Voodoo, challenging preconceived notions, and fostering a more inclusive and respectful discussion surrounding this enduring and vibrant spiritual tradition.

The multifaceted impact of Voodoo on the cultural landscape of New Orleans is both profound and complex. As the heart of the city's cultural mosaic, Voodoo's rich tapestry is woven into the very fabric of New Orleans' identity. The misrepresentations of Voodoo in popular media, have led to a series of effects that resonate across economic, cultural, and social dimensions. Economically, the fascination surrounding Voodoo, fueled by sensationalized portrayals, has become a driving force behind the city's cultural tourism industry. The commercialization of Voodoo through guided tours, museums, and merchandise has created economic opportunities for local artisans and entrepreneurs. It has not only sustained a thriving economy but has also integrated Voodoo themes into various aspects of the city's hospitality, enhancing the allure of cultural tourism in New Orleans.

Culturally, Voodoo serves as a significant symbol of identity, fostering inclusivity and diversity within the community. Despite the misinterpretations perpetuated by media, residents have uniquely crafted a complex tapestry of diverse traditions that embody a unique cultural blend distinct to New Orleans. Voodoo's significance extends beyond personal beliefs, playing a crucial role in connecting residents to their roots and heritage. Efforts to dispel misconceptions and promote accurate information about Voodoo have proven

crucial in nurturing a deeper appreciation for the cultural legacy of the city. Socially, festivals and events celebrating Voodoo, such as the Voodoo Music + Arts Experience, have become platforms for cultural expressions, providing temporary employment opportunities and stimulating the local job market. These events, while economically beneficial, also present challenges. The potential for negative effects, such as the perpetuation of stereotypes or misunderstandings, calls for a delicate balance between cultural celebration and commercialization.

The artistic expressions inspired by Voodoo in New Orleans exemplify the city's ability to engage in a continuous and evolving conversation. Local artists and filmmakers, both influenced and challenged by misrepresentations, contribute to a multifaceted narrative that bridges tradition and contemporary perspectives, reality, and imagination. This artistic discourse further enriches the city's cultural identity. Even in the realm of architecture, Voodoo leaves an indelible mark. Practitioners' sacred spaces and altars, along with Voodoo-inspired artwork and design elements, become integral parts of the city's architectural identity. Buildings and sites with historical or spiritual significance stand as concrete representations of the deep-rooted connection between Voodoo and the architectural heritage of New Orleans.

While the misinterpretations surrounding Voodoo have brought both positive contributions and challenges to New Orleans, this thesis underscores the need for a thoughtful and respectful approach. Balancing the economic advantages with cultural preservation, locals play a vital role in dispelling stereotypes and ensuring the true essence of Voodoo is preserved and celebrated. As New Orleans navigates the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity, authenticity and commercialization, the continued vibrancy of Voodoo within the city's cultural landscape remains a testament to the resilience and adaptability of this unique spiritual tradition. In embracing the complexities and contradictions, New Orleans ensures that the heartbeat of Voodoo pulses authentically within its cultural mosaic.

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