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Review Of "Mojo Workin': The Old African American Hoodoo System" By K. Hazzard-Donald

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and students of Indigenous religions, religion in America, religion and healing, and ritual studies.

Sarah Dees, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Mojo Workin': The Old African American Hoodoo System. By Katrina Hazzard-Donald. University of Illinois Press, 2013. xii + 234 pages. \$85.00 cloth; \$28.00 paper.

The study of Africana religions is undergoing a methodological turn. As proposed by Charles Long more than forty years ago, greater attention to comparative, historical, and phenomenological approaches can reorient academics' perspectives. It is in acknowledgement of current theoretical trends that Katrina Hazzard-Donald's *Mojo Workin': The Old African American Hoodoo System* should be considered. An anthropologist with practical and intellectual interests in black culture, Hazzard-Donald views Hoodoo as "embodied historical memory" and "a paradigm for approaching both the world and all areas of social life" (4). Although her research conclusions are highly speculative, the book presents possibilities for reassessing some misunderstood aspects of the African American religious experience.

Hoodoo is described by participants as "magic," and as spiritual "work," but rarely as a "religion." Hazzard-Donald asserts that the origins of Hoodoo can be found in the "reorganized remnants" of what was "assuredly" a "short-lived . . . full-blown syncretized African-based religion" that appeared in the U.S. sometime between the 18th and 19th centuries (2). This religion provided a structure by which enslaved Africans and their descendants engaged with supernatural forces and material elements so as to influence the conditions of their existence, with functions that ranged from empowerment to protection, and from conflict resolution to healing. Hazzard-Donald treads familiar terrain in the secondary sources while offering revisions to consensus narratives. For example, she argues that Hoodoo created a "sacred canopy" under which elements such as spirit possession, ancestor reverence, ritual sacrifice, and ceremonial dances like the ring shout were incorporated (9). And while her writing exhibits a general disregard for historical specificity and documented evidence, her employment of multidisciplinary methods, as seen in a fascinating chapter on the provenance of the plant healer and popular Hoodoo spirit, *High John the Conquer*, somewhat makes up for these lapses.

Hazzard-Donald takes sharp aim at what she calls "marketteered" Hoodoo, a commercialized practice that overlapped with the expansion of black folk traditions beyond the South in the early 20th century. Purveyors of this new form of urban Hoodoo promoted manufactured

products instead of the natural materials and plant sources that had been essential to the core traditions, and offered mail-order distribution of curios and merchandise of generic quality in lieu of local modes of community exchange. Also culpable in the shift to “snake oil” Hoodoo, argues Hazzard-Donald, was the professional medical establishment, which disrupted medicinal supply networks that had been controlled by African American midwives, root workers, and domestic treaters, thus undermining the efficacy of Hoodoo as an authoritative healing tradition (153). Notably absent in this analysis is the role that religion played in the diminishment of black belt Hoodoo. Did Christianity in any way contribute to its declension? Did alternative or competing theologies foster the emergence of imitative and hybridized forms of outsider Hoodoo? Hazzard-Donald decries the displacement of old Hoodoo as the marketeered Hoodoo industry superseded African American traditions with consumer-oriented, profit-driven styles in a pattern of “racially targeted, economic and cultural exploitation” such as that which prevailed under “colonialism and slavery” (180). The discussion falls short, however, in that she does not make fully clear why, in this specific period, contending forces brought about the demise of such an enduring and essential institution.

Hazzard-Donald views Hoodoo atavistically, lamenting its potential loss as a “national African American cultural product and spiritual tradition” (180). Insider claims to authenticity and proprietary knowledge may alienate some readers, but it is with a profound respect for Hoodoo as a living practice that Hazzard-Donald brings a kind of moral authority to her scholarship. In so doing she also distills many of the polarizing dynamics present in Hoodoo-Conjure communities today. The implications are great and the stakes are high for scholars, practitioners and others who seek to understand meaning in Hoodoo and African American religion, and to appreciate the value of tradition in the midst of change.

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The Charismatic Leadership Phenomenon in Radical and Militant Islam,
By Haroro J. Ingram. Ashgate, 2013. 252 pp. \$119.95 cloth.

This book belongs to the growing field of “national security studies,” “insurgency studies,” “counter-terrorism” and “terrorism prevention studies,” “conflict resolution studies,” etc. that has been quite successful (judging by a spate of recent publications and job openings in Western academia) in establishing its usefulness as an academic discipline. The author’s main goal is to examine what he describes as “the Transformative Charisma Phenomenon in Islamist Radicalism and Militancy” (4). To