

Overview

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- Vodou (or Voodoo) is a monotheistic religion. Common in Haiti and New Orleans, Vodou merges Catholic and African beliefs
- Translates to the "Spirit of God"
- Two main Branches, African Vodou and Haitian Vodou/Louisiana Vodoun
 - HV/LV Creolized with Christianity
- the belief in multiple gods and spiritual possession, additionally:
 - Veneration of ancestors
 - Rituals or objects used to convey magical protection
 - Animal sacrifices used to show respect for a god, to gain its favor or to give thanks
 - The use of fetishes, or objects meant to contain the essence or power of particular spirits
 - Ceremonial dances, which often involve elaborate costumes and masks
 - Ceremonial music and instruments, especially including drums
 - Divination using the interpretation of physical activities, like tossing seed hulls or pulling a stone of a certain color from a tree
 - The association of colors, foods, plants and other items with specific loa and the use of these items to pay tribute to the loa
- the lwa/loa are not deities but are spirits, whether of human or divine origin, that were created by Bondye (God) to assist the living in their daily affairs.
 - HV/LV uses Catholic saints/angels in the mix....
- Hoodoo is Voodoo w/o the region...folk magic
- Riding/possession by Loa
- Marie Laveau - Voodoo Priestess of New Orleans
- Zombies created by zombie powder
 - Clairvius Narcisse - Actual zombie
- Gris-Gris -> Charms/talismans



What is Voodoo

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An Introduction to the Basic Beliefs of the Vodou (Voodoo) Religion

Dispelling the Myths About Vodou



By
[Catherine Beyer](#)
Updated on May 02, 2018

Vodou (or Voodoo) is a monotheistic religion that is often misunderstood. Common in Haiti and New Orleans, Vodou merges Catholic and [African](#) beliefs to form a unique set of rituals that include [Voodoo dolls](#) and [symbolic drawings](#). However, as with any religion, followers of Vodou cannot be lumped into a single category. There are also many misconceptions, which are just as important to understand.

Understanding Vodoodoo

Vodou is also known as Vodoun, Vodoodoo, and by several other variants. It is a syncretic religion that combines Roman Catholicism and native African religion, particularly from the religion of the Dahomey region of West Africa (the modern day nation of Benin).

Vodou is primarily practiced in Haiti, New Orleans, and other locations within the Caribbean.

Vodou began when African slaves brought their native traditions with them as they were forcefully transported to the new world. However, they were generally forbidden from practicing their religion. To get around these restrictions, the slaves started to equate their gods with [Catholic saints](#). They also performed their rituals using the items and imagery of the Catholic Church.

If a Vodou practitioner considers himself Christian, he generally professes to be a [Catholic Christian](#). Many Vodou practitioners also consider themselves Catholics. Some see the saints and spirits to be one and the same. Others still hold that the Catholic accouterments are primarily for appearance.

Misconceptions About Vodoodoo

Popular culture has strongly associated Vodou with devil worship, torture, cannibalism, and malevolent magical workings. This is largely the product of Hollywood coupled with historical misrepresentations and misunderstandings of the faith.

The seeds of these misconceptions began much earlier than anything seen in the movies. A well-known incident in 1791 at Bois Caiman marked a crucial time in Haitian slave uprisings. The exact details and intent are a matter of historical debate. It's believed that witnesses saw a Vodou ceremony and thought the participants were making some sort of pact with the Devil to thwart their captors. Some people -- even as recent as 2010 after the devastating earthquake -- have claimed that this pact has perpetually cursed the Haitian people.

In the Vodou-influenced areas such as Haiti, slavery was extremely violent and brutal; the revolts of the slaves were equally as violent. All of this led white settlers to associate the religion with violence and also helped fuel many unfounded rumors about Vodouisants.

Basic Beliefs: Bondye, Lwa, and Vilokan

Vodou is a [monotheistic religion](#). Followers of Vodou -- known as Vodouisants -- believe in a single, supreme godhead that can be equated with the Catholic God. This deity is known as [Bondye, "the good god"](#). Vodouisants also accept the existence of lesser beings, which they call *loa* or *lwa*. These are more intimately involved in day-to-day life than Bondye, who is a remote figure. The lwa are divided into three families: [Rada, Petro, and Ghede](#). The relationship between humans and lwa is a reciprocal one. Believers provide food and other items that appeal to the lwa in exchange for their assistance. The lwa are frequently invited to possess a believer during ritual so the community can directly interact with them.

Vilokan is the home of the lwa as well as the deceased. It is commonly described as a submerged and forested island. It is guarded by the lwa Legba, who must be appeased before practitioners can speak to any other Vilokan resident.

Rituals and Practices

There is no standardized dogma within Vodou. Two temples within the same city might teach different mythologies and appeal to the lwa in different ways.

As such, the information provided in overviews of Vodou (such as this one) cannot always reflect the beliefs of all believers. For example, sometimes lwa are associated with different families, Catholic saints, or vevs. Some common variations are included here.

- **Animal Sacrifice** A variety of animals might be killed during a Vodou ritual, depending upon the lwa being addressed. It provides spiritual sustenance for the lwa, while the flesh of the animal is then cooked and eaten by participants.
- **Vevs** Rituals commonly involve the drawing of certain symbols known as vevs with cornmeal or another powder. Each lwa has its own symbol and some have multiple symbols associated with them.
- **Voodoo Dolls** The common perception of Vodouisants poking pins into Voodoo dolls does not reflect traditional Vodou. However, Vodouisants do dedicate dolls to particular lwa and use them to attract a lwa's influence.

From <https://www.learnreligions.com/vodou-an-introduction-for-beginners-95712>

What is Voodoo? A Tradition of Magic and Interconnected Realms



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When the word "voodoo" arises, it's usually accompanied with misconceptions, fear, and a lack of understanding. Often thought of as a violent cult, the truth couldn't be farther from the popular cultural associations, such as voodoo dolls, witchdoctors, and violent-tinged sorcery. Vodoodoo, more appropriately known as *vodou*, is an ancient and diversely practiced religious tradition tied to Africa, the Caribbean, and the Catholic church.

But what exactly is *Vodou*?

Voodoo: A Rich Tradition Born From Trauma

The word *Voodoo/Vodou/Vodun* translates to mean "the spirit of God." *Vodou* is a monotheistic religion; followers, or *vodouisants*, believe in one divine figurehead called [Bondye](#) or "the good god." Additionally, *Vodou* has a lesser god hierarchy, *lwa*, as well as *loa* who are more engaged with the day-to-day life than Bondye, who is considered to be more remote. The *loa/lwa* are split into three families: Rada, Petro, and Ghede. Humans and *Lwa* [have a reciprocal relationship](#) in which believers provide sustenance and objects in exchange for the *Lwa's* protection.

Vodou combines traditions from Africa, the Caribbean, Native Americans, and Catholicism. There is evidence that as far back as 1492, many in the *Taino* culture were executed for their practice of *Vodou* during Christopher Columbus' conquering of Hispaniola. But as the slave trade grew, so did *Vodou*; the newly arrived African slaves and the surviving *Taino* found much in common in their shared rituals and [approaches to healing](#). *Vodou* does not have a central scripture, it is community-centric and supports individualism. New Orleans is North America's *vodou* epicenter, where it arrived through the slave trade from West Africa during the 18th century. Catholicism was the primary religion in the city, and what is now known as "[New Orleans Vodou](#)," is in actuality a hybrid between the two traditions. New Orleans *Vodou* has become so ingrained in the city's culture that one need only search online to see the multitude of shops, tourist attractions, and other popular destinations that keep the tradition alive.

From <https://www.gaia.com/article/what-is-voodoo-a-tradition-of-magic-and-interconnected-realms>

African Voodoo

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African Voodoo (Vodou)



A resident dances with a snake during a ceremony for the guardian of the night, Zangbeto, in the village of Alongo, Benin, May 14, 2018. YANICK FOLLY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Voodoo originated in the African kingdoms of Fon and Kongo as many as 6,000 years ago. The word "voodoo" comes from the Fon language, in which it means "sacred," "spirit" or "deity." Other words used in Voodoo also come from the Fon and Kongo languages. For example, a Voodoo priestess is often referred to as a mambo or manbo. This is a combination of the Fon word for "mother" or "magical charm" and the Kongo word for "healer."

The Fon kingdom was located in what is now southern Benin, a region some anthropologists refer to as the "cradle of Voodoo." Voodoo is an official religion in Benin, where as many as 40 percent of the people are followers [source: [BBC](#)]. An estimated 60 million people practice Voodoo worldwide [source: [Guynup](#)].

Since Voodoo is primarily an oral tradition, the names of gods, as well as the specifics of different rituals, can change in different regions or from generation to generation. However, African Voodoo has several consistent qualities no matter where people practice it. Along with the belief in multiple gods and spiritual possession, these include:

- Veneration of ancestors
- Rituals or objects used to convey magical protection
- Animal sacrifices used to show respect for a god, to gain its favor or to give thanks
- The use of **fetishes**, or objects meant to contain the essence or power of particular spirits
- Ceremonial dances, which often involve elaborate costumes and masks
- Ceremonial music and instruments, especially including drums
- Divination using the interpretation of physical activities, like tossing seed hulls or pulling a stone of a certain color from a tree
- The association of colors, foods, plants and other items with specific loa and the use of these items to pay tribute to the loa

Many of these traits, particularly ancestor worship, polytheism, and the importance of music and dance, are also important in other African religions. So, in practice, Voodoo looks a lot like other traditional African religions. Many observances appear

to be part celebration, part religious service incorporating rhythmic music, dancing and songs. Many rituals take advantage of the natural landscape, such as rivers, mountains or trees. Through decoration and consecration, ordinary objects, like pots, bottles or parts of slaughtered animals, become sacred objects for use in rituals. In parts of Africa, people who want to become spiritual leaders in the Voodoo community can enter religious centers, which are much like convents or monasteries. In some communities, initiates symbolically die, spending three days and nights in complete seclusion before being returned to the outside world. Initiates learn the rituals, colors, foods and objects associated with different deities, as well as how to communicate with the loa. The spirits have different personalities and different requirements of their followers, much like the gods in Greek and Roman myths.

Some people associate Voodoo with evil, but many of its rituals, even those that include the sacrifice of live animals, focus on respect and peace. Its religious leaders become community leaders, providing guidance and settling disputes. Leaders also frequently provide medical care in the form of folk medicine. Priests, priestesses and other practitioners typically dedicate their work to helping and caring for others [source: [Visit Haiti](#)].

Curses, witchcraft and spells designed to do harm fall instead into a separate religious practice known as *bo* in Africa or *Makaya* and *Bizango* in Haiti. These are "secret societies" outside of traditional Voodoo that blend ancient native dark magic with European necromancy and deal in curses, zombies and shape-shifting. In the U.S., sometimes this black magic is called "hoodoo" [source: [Visit Haiti](#)].

The regions of Africa where Voodoo has thrived are also areas that were heavily trafficked during the slave trade. Slavery brought Voodoo to the Americas. Next, we'll look at the changes to Voodoo that took place on the other side of the Atlantic.

From <<https://people.howstuffworks.com/voodoo.htm>>

Haitian Voodoo

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Haitian Voodoo (Vodou)



A woman burns fire during a Voodoo ceremony, traditionally held at the start of a protest as Haitians take to the streets to protest over the increasing insecurity in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince, March 29, 2022. VALERIE BAERISWYL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

In the American colonies, African Voodoo became what is known as Haitian Voodoo today. In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on an island known to its indigenous Taino inhabitants as Ayiti, or "Land of the Mountains." Columbus re-named this island Hispaniola, or "Little Spain" [source: [Black History Month](#)]. Colonists arrived, building plantations that became rich sources of crops like sugar, coffee and indigo. To make these plantations profitable, colonists relied heavily on slave labor. Eventually, Hispaniola became the countries known as Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Many of the enslaved people brought to Hispaniola from northern and central Africa in the 16th to 18th centuries practiced Voodoo. But the colony's slave code required all slaves to be baptized as Christians [source: [The Pluralism Project](#)]. This forced conversion had a big influence on Voodoo. Since enslaved people could not practice their religion openly, they borrowed many elements from Catholicism to protect their own spiritual practice. This process, known as **syncretization**, strongly influenced Voodoo in Haiti:

- The names of Catholic saints became the names of loa. In many cases, the loa's role reflected that of the corresponding saint. For example, Saint Peter holds the keys to the kingdom of Heaven and corresponds to the loa [Papa Legba](#), who is the spirit world's gatekeeper [source: [Dialogue Institute](#)].
- Catholic religious holidays became Voodoo holidays for the corresponding loa. For instance, celebrations for a family of spirits called the Gedes, who are personifications of dead ancestors, take place on All Saints Day and All Souls Day.
- Christian crosses became symbols for the crossroads, which represents life-altering choices and steps in the spiritual path for followers of Voodoo.
- Catholic hymns and prayers became part of Voodoo services.

Several other influences affected Voodoo as well, including the traditions of the local Taino tribes.

The resulting form of Voodoo is a **creolized** religion, made up of influences from many other religions [source: [Dialogue Institute](#)]. But in spite of these additions,

Haitian Voodoo strongly resembles African Voodoo. Priestesses, known as *manbos* and priests, known as *oungans*, conduct religious services and provide traditional folk remedies [source: [Visit Haiti](#)]. People who wish to become *manbos* or *oungans* often enter an apprenticeship as initiates with other leaders rather than joining a large-scale worship center. Many ceremonies take place in a structure called a *hounfour*, which serves as a temple or sanctuary. As in Africa, possession is an important part of Voodoo in Haiti [source: [Visit Haiti](#)]. The person being possessed is often called a **horse** who is **ridden** by the possessing loa. The possessed person may move unnaturally, speak in unknown languages or make clear, direct statements to the other followers. Sacrifice is also important, and many ceremonies involve sacrificing goats, chickens or other animals. In many cases, the combination of possession, animal sacrifice and the ritual dancing and music that accompany them can seem dramatic or even frightening to outside observers.

Haitian Voodoo also incorporates clothing, objects and decorations to invoke or show respect for the loa. Kongo packets, or medicine packets, hold healing or medicinal herbs and items. Worshipers carry flags called *drapo* through areas used for worship to show respect for the spirits. To call to and invoke the loa, people play a variety of drums, bells and rattles. Altars hold numerous ritual objects, such as decorated bottles, dolls and *kwi*, or calabashes full of food offerings. Worshipers use the dolls as mediums to contact specific loa or the spirit world in general, not to inflict pain or suffering on others [source: [Visit Haiti](#)].

Today, many of the objects have become part of Haitian artwork and crafts. Some Haitian artists, for example, focus on creating depictions of different loa, elaborate *drapo* or ornately decorated ritual objects.

As in African Voodoo, *manbos* and *oungans* in Haitian Voodoo do not typically curse or harm other people. However, some followers believe that *bokors*, or sorcerers, have the ability to use magic to cause misfortune or injury. *Bokors* are also part of [zombie](#) lore — some believe that a *bokor* can use poisons and capture a person's soul to create a zombie [source: [NPR](#)].

Voodoo is an important part in the day-to-day lives of many Haitians. Estimates vary, but in general anthropologists believe that 50 to 80 percent of Haitians practice some form of Voodoo, often in concert with other religions [source: [U.S. Dept. of State](#)].

Voodoo has also played an important role in Haitian history.

The French Revolution in 1789 sparked revolutions elsewhere in the world, including in several colonies in the Americas. In 1797, a Voodoo priest performed a ceremony at Bois Caiman in the Haitian mountains, which gave the slaves otherworldly strength. This ceremony prefaced a slave revolt that lasted until 1804, and the people of Haiti fought armies from Spain, France and Britain [source: [The Guardian](#)]. Eventually, Haiti became the first free, Black colony in the Americas. This ceremony and its importance are somewhat controversial, but they have become part of Haitian lore.

Voodoo is widely and openly practiced in Haiti. It also exists in various forms in New Orleans and the southeastern United States. In some cases, the Voodoo practiced in other parts of the Western hemisphere is mixed with other, similar traditions, pagan practices or other customs. However, in some regions, folk magical practices known as hoodoo have overtaken Voodoo in the public eye. Love spells, curses and methods of revenge generally fall under the umbrella of hoodoo and are not Voodoo practices at all.

From <https://people.howstuffworks.com/voodoo.htm#pt2>

Hoodoo vs. Voodoo

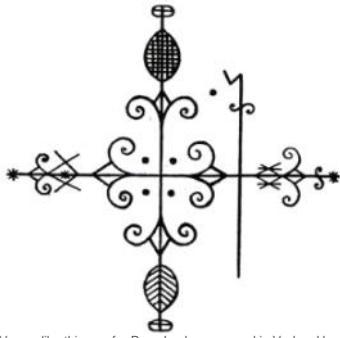
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What is the difference between Voodoo, Hoodoo and Santeria?

[Clarifying Misconceptions](#), [Religious Differences](#), [Terminology](#)

July 21, 2012

by [Santeria Church](#)



Veves, like this one for Papa Legba, are used in Vodou. Veves are NOT used in Santeria.

All too often, [Santeria](#) is mistakenly confused with other African-derived magical or religious systems. It is very common for people to refer to the practices of [Santeria Lucumi \(Lukumí\)](#) as "voodoo" by the media, in television and cinema. Movies and television are notorious for lumping all African Diasporic Traditions into one boat, calling them all voodoo and then mocking them or creating sensationalism that is rooted in cultural misinformation. Tack on to this cross-confusion between Voodoo and [Hoodoo](#) and you get a whole other layer of misunderstanding about what Santeria really is. We hope this article will help clarify some confusions, and help set the record straight once and for all.

Santeria and Voodoo are often confused for one another

Both [Santeria](#) and Voodoo are religions but they are not the same thing. Let's begin with an explanation of Voodoo. First, Voodoo is more properly spelled Vodou or Vodoun. There are two main branches to Vodou, Haitian Vodou and Louisiana (or New Orleans) Vodoun.

Haitian Vodou is an African Diasporic Religion that came together from the traditional African religious practices of several tribes, some of whom were rivals forced to survive and depend on one another under the conditions of slavery. These tribes included the Fon, [Yoruba](#), Congo and even elements of the native Taino population that survived in Haiti. These people united their practices in an effort to survive, and created a "regleman" (ritual order) to honor and give each tribe's spirits their moment of worship. These practices were also influenced through syncretism with French Catholicism. Evidence of this can be seen in the use of Catholic saint images to represent the Lwa (spirits) honored in Vodou. The Lwa (spirits) of Vodou are composed of the Rada Lwa (the vudu and [orishas](#) of the Fon and Yoruba people), the Petwo Lwa (the fiery spirits of the Congo, the Taino and modern-Haitian people) and the Gede Lwa (the spirits of the dead). Veves, ornate ceremonial drawings laid out on the ground or on tables, are used to call the Lwa in Vodou, but not in [Santeria](#). Haitian Vodou does have an initiated priesthood, but initiation is not a requirement for participation in the religion and the vast majority of vodouisants are non-initiates. Magical wanga and gris-gris are often used in Haitian Vodou's magic. Haitian Vodou's primary liturgical language is Kreyol, the local dialect of Haitian French.



A typical Haitian Vodou altar. Compare this to the photo below of a [Santeria](#) altar and note the differences. Photo by Jeremy Burgins.

Louisiana Vodoun is markedly different from Haitian Vodou. It is more of an amalgamation of religious and magical practices found in the southern United States. This includes some of the Lwa found in Haitian Vodou, a strong presence of the Catholic Saints, and elements of southern folk magic like gris-gris, wanga and mojo bags. There is not a "regleman" in the same manner as Haitian Vodou and there is more of an emphasis on self-made Vodou Queens like the famous Marie Laveau. Louisiana Vodoun has a strong connection with [Spiritualism](#) and shares many magical techniques with [Hoodoo](#) (southern folk magic) – but should not be confused with [Hoodoo](#). You will see the use of veves (ornate painted symbols) in Louisiana Vodoun, much as in Haitian Vodou. Louisiana Vodoun's primary liturgical language is English with a bit of French Creole.

[Santeria](#) is a religion that evolved in Cuba. It is rooted in the African religious traditions of the [Yoruba](#) people (found in modern-day Nigeria). The followers of [Santeria](#) worship the [orishas](#), the demi-gods of the [Yoruba](#) people. While there is a veneer of Spanish Catholicism for the outsider, that element quickly drops away once a person has undergone [initiation](#). The primary involvement of Catholic elements in [Santeria](#) are found in [Espiritismo](#), a separate religious practice that has been deeply interwoven into [Santeria](#) as of the mid-1900's. [Santeria](#) is highly [initiatory](#), secretive and operates under strict religious rules. Participation in the religion is very limited to those who are not [initiated](#) and the great majority of participants are [initiates](#). [Santeria](#) does NOT use veves or ornate drawn symbols to call the [orishas](#) as are done in Vodou (bullseye-style paintings called osun are used in certain rituals but bear no resemblance to veves). [Santeria's](#) primary liturgical language is [Lukumí](#), a late 1800's dialect of the [Yoruban](#) language interspersed with elements of Cuban Spanish.



A [Santeria](#) altar (throne) to [Chango](#). Each container has a different [orisha's](#) mysteries within it, and is covered with decorative cloths, crowns and beaded mazos. Compare this with the Haitian Vodou altar above.

The religious proceedings and magical workings of these religious traditions may have similarities but they are certainly not the same thing. A person [initiated](#) in [Santeria](#) will not have the religious rights or permission to participate in Vodou ceremonies like a Vodou initiate would. A person [initiated](#) in Vodou would not have permission and rights to operate in a [Santeria](#) ceremony. Each of these religions is different from one another, and each uses different languages, prayers, songs and rituals from the others. The only commonality between them is the use of [animal sacrifice](#), and the employment of magical spell work as an integral part of their religious practice, but this is common with any religious practice from sub-saharan Africa.

What is Hoodoo? Is it Voodoo?

Often people mistake [Hoodoo](#) and Vodou. The difference between them is simple. Vodou is a religion. [Hoodoo](#) is nothing more than [Southern Folk Magic](#). [Hoodoo](#) uses the magical techniques of the Congo people of Africa without any of the religion. There is no presence of the nkisi, [orishas](#), or lwa of Africa. In fact, most people who practice [Hoodoo](#) are Protestant Christians. You'll see hoodoo workers also being called [rootworkers](#) or [conjurers](#). They make magical charms called mojo bags, or jack balls. They'll use magical powders, herbal cleansing baths, candles or lamps for spell work. All of this magical work is done while praying Psalms, praying to Jesus and God the Father, and reading from the Bible. While the vast majority of [Hoodoo](#) practitioners are Protestant Christians, there are some some Catholic practitioners who will petition Catholic saints. It's important to note that they are petitioning the Saints themselves, not as a syncretized image for an African deity or spirit. So Hoodoo is not Voodoo.

Stereotypical and Racist Depictions of Santeria and other ATRs



A typical hoodoo altar with several spells being worked for love, reconciliation and wisdom. A hoodoo practitioner will pray Psalms and Christian prayers when they cast spells.

For centuries, the African Traditional Religions (ATRs) have been the victim of racism and colonial stereotypes. This was an institutionalized way of dehumanizing the African people by labeling their religious practices as barbaric or demonic. This changing society's perception of black people into animals or subhuman, in order to justify the slave trade and the brutal treatment of African people by invading muslim and christian missionaries.

Racist depictions of [Santeria](#) and other ATR practices include depicting the religions as satanic. It is common to portray these religions as nothing more than harmful spell casters focusing on zombifying people, using voodoo dolls to harm people, or engaging in cannibalism or pacts with the devil. (It is important to note that the use of dolls in magic comes from European witchcraft traditions.) Satan does not exist in [Santeria](#). Satan is not worshipped in the ATRs. Cannibalism does not exist in [Santeria](#), nor do we shrink heads or any such thing.

Remember when you see depictions like this in movies or television programs, they are racist depictions serving to scare those of European descent by portraying African religions as barbaric. Even the term "black magic" is a racist term. It originates from the labeling of African people as black and the characterization of their religions as purely evil. Therefore "black magic" meant black religious practice was evil. At the [Santeria Church of the Orishas](#) we detest the term "black magic" and prefer that people call things what they actually are. When referring to harmful magic call it harmful magic, not "black magic" out of respect for the black people of Africa and their peace-filled beautiful religious practices.

From <http://santeriachurch.org/what-is-the-difference-between-voodoo-hoodoo-and-santeria/>

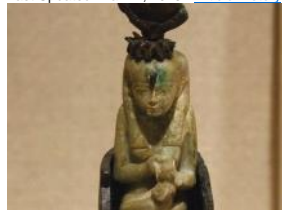
Monotheism

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monotheism

theology

Last Updated: Mar 14, 2023 • [Article History](#)



Isis nursing Horus

monotheism, belief in the existence of one god, or in the oneness of [God](#). As such, it is distinguished from [polytheism](#), the belief in the existence of many gods, from [atheism](#), the belief that there is no god, and from [agnosticism](#), the belief that the existence or nonexistence of a god or of gods is unknown or unknowable. Monotheism [characterizes](#) the traditions of [Judaism](#), [Christianity](#), and [Islam](#), and elements of the belief are discernible in numerous other religions.

Monotheism and polytheism are often thought of in rather simple terms—e.g., as merely a numerical contrast between the one and the many. The history of religions, however, indicates many phenomena and concepts that should warn against oversimplification in this matter. There is no valid reason to assume, for example, that monotheism is a later development in the history of religions than polytheism. There exists no historical material to prove that one system of belief is older than the other, although many scholars hold that monotheism is a higher form of [religion](#) and therefore must be a later development, assuming that what is higher came later. Moreover, it is not the oneness but the uniqueness of God that counts in monotheism; one god is not affirmed as the logical opposite of many gods but as an expression of divine might and power.

The choice of either monotheism or polytheism, however, leads to problems, because neither can give a satisfactory answer to all questions that may reasonably be put. The weakness of polytheism is especially revealed in the realm of questions about the ultimate origin of things, whereas monotheism runs into difficulties in trying to answer the question concerning the [origin of evil](#) in a [universe](#) under the government of one god. There remains always an [antithesis](#) between the multiplicity of forms of the divine [manifestations](#) and the unity that can be thought or posited behind them. The one and the many form no static contradistinction; there is, rather, a polarity and a dialectic tension between them. The history of religions shows various efforts to combine unity and multiplicity in the [conception](#) of the divine. Because Judaism and Christianity are monotheistic religions, the monotheistic conception of the divine has assumed for Western [culture](#) the value of a self-evident axiom. This unquestioned assumption becomes clear when it is realized that for Western culture there is no longer an acceptable choice between monotheism and polytheism but only a choice between monotheism, atheism, and agnosticism.

From <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/monotheism>>

Monotheism

Monotheism is the [belief](#) that there is only one [deity](#), an all-supreme being that is universally referred to as [God](#).^{[1][2][3][4][5][6][7]} A distinction may be made between exclusive monotheism, in which the one God is a singular existence, and both inclusive and pluriform monotheism, in which multiple gods or godly forms are recognized, but each are postulated as extensions of the same God.^[4]

Monotheism is distinguished from [henotheism](#), a religious system in which the believer worships one God without denying that others may worship different gods with equal validity, and [monolatry](#), the recognition of the existence of many gods but with the consistent worship of only one deity.^[4] The term [monolatry](#) was perhaps first used by [Julius Wellhausen](#).^[8]

Monotheism characterizes the traditions of [Bábism](#), the [Bahá'í Faith](#), [Cheondoism](#), [Christianity](#),^[10] [Deism](#), [Druzism](#),^[11] [Eckankar](#), [Sikhism](#), some [sects of Hinduism](#) (such as [Shaivism](#) and [Vaishnavism](#)), [Islam](#), [Judaism](#), [Mandaeism](#), [Rastafari](#), [Seicho-no-Ie](#), [Tenrikyo](#), [Yazidism](#), and [Ateism](#). Elements of monotheistic thought are found in early religions such as [Zoroastrianism](#), [ancient Chinese religion](#), and [Yahwism](#).

From <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism>>

Lwa/Loa

April 29, 2023

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Lwa Vodou

Also known as: loa

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Fact-checked by

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

Last Updated: [Article History](#)



lwa ceremony

Lwa, also spelled **loa**, the primary spirits of [Vodou](#). They are akin to the [orishas](#) of [Yoruba religion](#) and of similar Afro-Caribbean new religious movements, but, unlike the orishas, the *lwa* are not deities but are spirits, whether of human or [divine](#) origin, that were created by Bondye (God) to assist the living in their daily affairs.

Description

There are more than 1,000 *lwa* in Vodou, and they are grouped in 17 pantheons (*nanchon*). The Rada and Petwo pantheons are arguably the most important, in terms of both size and the role played by Rada and Petwo *lwa* in Vodou, and, in fact, many of the other groups have been [integrated](#) into the Rada and the Petwo pantheons. This fusion underscores the difficulty one may face when adhering to too strict a classification, as there are constant overlaps between the different pantheons of *lwa*. Moreover, the same *lwa* may appear as Rada and as Petwo. What seems to distinguish the Rada pantheon from the Petwo pantheon is, above all, the general character, attitude, or persona of the *lwa*. Rada *lwa* are often associated with a peaceful [demeanor](#) and [benevolent](#) attitude, although they may also turn out to be quite [vindictive](#) if displeased or offended. In contrast, Petwo *lwa* are commonly thought of as forceful, aggressive, and dangerous. Yet they may also be protective of the living and quite generous.

Although the *lwa* are quite numerous, some are held in special esteem. This is the case, for instance, of the powerful Legba, the master and keeper of crossroads, without whom communication with the spirits is impossible and can never take place. Other *lwa* of particular significance include spirits such as Agwe (also called Agwe-Tawoyo), the *lwa* of the sea, and his female counterpart, Lasirèn; Danbala Wèdo and his wife, Ayida Wèdo, who are represented as two snakes and stand for the power and [eternity](#) of life; and Èzili Freda, known as the “*lwa* of Love.” Others

include Loko, the *lwa* of trees and vegetation in general, and the [patron](#) of *manbo* and *oungan* and of the *ounfò* (temple); Ogou, the symbol of strength and power; the Marasa, the sacred twins; Ayizan, the *lwa* of market places and protector of merchants; and Azaka, the *lwa* presiding over agricultural work and life; and Gede, the *lwa* of death.

Veneration

The *lwa* play a major role in the lives of Vodou devotees. In fact, the relationship between the *lwa* and the living is intense, demanding, and yet reported to be quite fulfilling. Human beings serve the *lwa*, whom they love, respect, and fear. In fact, Vodou practitioners always, out of respect, use the prefix *Papa* (“father”), *Manman* (“mother”), or *Metres* (“mistress”) while referring to a *lwa*. In return for their devotion and piety, the living expect blessings, protection, and favours from the *lwa*.

The intense nature of this relationship is made quite obvious during Vodou ceremonies, which are held for the *lwa*. Such religious services take place within the confines of an *ounfò*, under the [auspices](#) of a Vodou priest ([oungan](#)) or priestess (*manbo*).

The central part of the *peristil*, the semi-open space usually located at the entrance of the *ounfò*, where public rituals actually take place, is occupied by a *potomitan* (“pillar in the middle”). This is a pillar usually decorated with a beautiful spiralling snake and connecting the ground to the ceiling. The *lwa* are believed to ascend or descend through the *potomitan*, which is therefore seen as a magical axis. Given this, the *potomitan* plays a critical role during Vodou ceremonies. The *potomitan* is associated with Danbala and with the Legba, the keeper of the [crossroads](#).



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Through appropriate songs, dances, the tracing of [vèvè](#) (spiritual drawings), [prayers](#), and drumming, the *lwa* are invited to join the living, partake in the ceremony, and accept whatever offerings or sacrifices that may be presented to them. Upon arriving, the *lwa* will “ride” one of the attendees, oftentimes the *oungan* or *manbo* presiding over the service, and through this individual who is “riding with the *lwa*” the spirit may communicate with the living. The living may also take advantage of the presence of a *lwa* to ask questions or present requests.

Marrying the *lwa*

It is also common for Vodou adherents, regardless of whether they have been initiated, to marry a *lwa* as part of a [ritual](#) known as *maryaj mistik* (“mystic marriage”). The ritual is reminiscent of a wedding ceremony between two human beings because it involves special attire, a wedding cake, a wedding ring, and a priest. The purpose of *maryaj mistik* is to enter a special relationship with a *lwa*, thus further securing spiritual protection. One of the taboos associated with this type of

marriage requires [sexual abstinence](#) on the holiday associated with the *lwa* in order to keep oneself receptive to messages from one's spiritual spouse, primarily through dreams, on that particular night.

People will often choose to marry their *mèt tèt*, that is, the *lwa* who has been identified, either through [divination](#) or consultation with the spirits, to “walk” with that person. The personalities of the devotee and of his or her *mèt tèt* are often quite similar. For example, a person whose *mèt tèt* is Ogou is expected to be brave, bold, and sometimes quick tempered. On the contrary, someone with Èzili Freda as a *mèt tèt* will be expected to be a bit [frivolous](#) and yet quite generous.

From <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/lwa-Vodou>>

Descriptions of Various Loa of Voodoo

Compilation from class assignments, Spring, 1990.

Done for Bob Corbett by Jan Chatland

- **Ayida:** The female counterpart Ayida: The female counterpart
- **Adjassou:** Characterized by protruding eyes and a bad humor, lives under the mombin tree near a spring and is very fond of vermouth, rum, and cognac.
- **Agassu:** Dahomean in origin and belonging to the Fon and Yaruba tribes. When a person is possessed by Agassu, his hands become crooked and stiffened, therefore resembling claws. In Dahomey, he is the result of a union between a panther and a woman. He is associated with water deities and sometimes takes the form of a crab. He is one of the mythical creatures who once gave assistance to the Ancestor. He is considered one of the loa masons.
- **Agau:** Agau is a very violent god. Earth tremors and the frightening sounds associated with storms are because of Agau. The trances induced by his mounting are so violent there have been deaths associated with his brutality. When one is mounted one attempts to imitate the sounds of thunder and tremors, if they are strong enough to utter sounds under the possession. The possessed person keeps repeating, "It is I who am the gunner of god; when I roar the earth trembles." It is said that when the earth tremors, Agau is angry. Those who are strong enough to keep him in their bodies are puffing with all their strength and sputtering like seals. One has to be very strong to harbor this spirit.
- **When Sogbo and Bade** (the loa of lighting and wind) act together and call upon Agau, a thunder storm is produced. Bade and Agau share the same functions, loa of the winds.
- **Agwe: (Agive)** He is invoked under the names "Shell of the Sea," "Eel," and "Tadpole of the Pond." Sovereign of the sea. One of the many lovers of Erzulie. Under his jurisdiction come not only all the flora and fauna of the sea, but all ships which sail on the sea. His symbols are tiny boats, brightly painted oars and shells, and sometimes small metal fishes. He likes military uniforms and gunfire. He is the protector of seafaring men. The service for Agwe is quite different from others since it is on the sea itself. A conch shell is used to call him during a voodoo ritual. He must be greeted with wet sponges and towels when leaving the water because of the heat. A barque is prepared with all sort of Agwe's favorite foods, including champagne. This barque is then floated over where it is believed the sacred underwater world exists. If the barque sinks, then Agwe has accepted the sacrifice and will protect the water interests of those who have prepared the sacrifice. Were the barque to float back into shore, then the service has been refused and a different manner of placating Agwe would have to be devised. The animals that are sacrificed to him are two white sheep. Depicted as a mulatto with fair skin and green eyes. Services take place near seas, rivers, or lakes. Must be careful that those possessed do not jump into the water. Any reference to signaling can only come as a pleasure to this god. Agwe's counterpart is **La Sirine**, the siren of the seas. In connection with Christianity, Agwe has borrowed traits from St. Ulrich, who is often pictured with a fish in his hand.
- **Ayezan: (Aizan, Ayizan)** This is the Legba's wife. She protects the markets, public places, doors, and barriers, and has a deep knowledge of the intricacies of the spirit world. Selects and instructs certain novice hounsans. When feeding her or her husband, a black or white goat or russet colored ox is offered up. Her favorite tree is the palm tree. Ayezan is symbolized by mounds of earth sprinkled with oil and surrounded by fringes of palm. Ayezan is Dahomean in origin and represented by an old woman in personification. She is one of the oldest gods and is therefore entitled to first offerings at services. She often mounts people only after her husband appears at the scene. Her mounts are never severe; therefore, she can sometimes take quite a while to spot. She is the mate of Loco (Loko). As a Mambo, Ayezan is reputed to have many children (devotees); she cares for her children greatly; she has a good, loving heart. She punishes those who have made mistakes not because she is a sadistic woman but to correct their behavior in the future. She will punish those adults taking advantage of the young, the rich of the poor, the strong of the weak and the husband of the wife. She is believed to have the ability to purify her surroundings and to exorcise malevolent spirits from her devotees.
- **Ayida:** The female counterpart of Dumballah, his mate, is Ayida. She is the mother figure. She is the rainbow. Together they are the unitary forces of human sexuality. Her symbol is also a serpent. She is quite submissive and very delicate. Her co-wife is Erzulie. It is said that whoever "can grasp the diadem of Ayida will be assured wealth" (Metraux, p. 105). Also known as Ayida Wedo: her job is that of holding up the earth.
- **Azacca or Zaka:** This is the loa of agriculture, but is generally seen as the brother of Ghede. For this reason Ghede will often come to the ceremonies for Zaka and come when Zaka has mounted someone. Zaka is a gentle simple peasant, but greatly respected by the peasants since he is a very hard worker. He is addressed as "cousin". He is found wherever there is country. He is usually barefoot, carries a macoute sack, wears a straw hat, and has a pipe in his mouth. By nature he is suspicious, out for profit, fond of quibbling, and has a fear and hatred of town folk. His vocal stylization consists of the almost unintelligible sounds of a goat. He is known for his gossip he spreads and for his "girl chasing." He is young and like to play when not working. There are interesting similarities between the sophisticated Ghede and the more bumbling Azacca, as though a younger less sophisticated brother were imitating a more secure older brother. Like Ghede, Zaka loves his food. But, unlike Ghede, he is rude and voracious in his eating habits, often running away to hide with him food and eat it quickly. His favorite dishes to eat are the ones peasants feed on—boiled maize, bread soaked in oil and slices of small intestine with fatty membrane fried, unrefined sugar. His favorite drink is white rum and his tree is the avocado. Zaka controls the fields, and like the farmers themselves, he is very watchful of detail. He notes who is treating whom in what manner, who is flirting with whom, who says what to whom etc. When he mounts someone he often spills out all the local gossip to the embarrassment and amusement of all. He does not forgive easily. It is rumored that Zaka often appears in concrete forms. In this concrete form, he assumes a limp and dresses in a ragged peasant outfit. Then he begs for rum or cassava melons. Those that refuse to give him anything are punished. Zaka is a polygamist and considers all his children as investments. He stands for the incest taboo, though, and will not break it no matter how rich he could become.
- **Bade:** The loa of wind. He is the inseparable companion of Sogbo, god of lightning. He also shares his functions with Agau, another storm spirit.
- **Bakulu: (Bakulu-baka)** He drags chains behind him and is such a terrible spirit that no one dares to invoke him. His habitat is in the woods where offerings are taken to him. He himself possesses no one. Since no one wants to call on him, people simply take any offerings that go to him and leave them in the woods.
- **Bosou Koblamir:** Violent petro loa. Bosou is a violent loa capable of defeating his enemies. He is very popular during times of war. He protects his followers when they travel at night. Bosou's appearance is that of a man with three horns; each horn has a meaning—strength, wildness, and violence. Sometimes Bosou comes to the help of his followers but he is not a very reliable loa. When a service is held, Bosou appears by breaking chains that he is restrained. Immediately upon appearing he is given a pig, his favorite food. The ceremony in honor of Bosou always pleases a congregation because it allows them to eat. Usually a good number of people attend such a service.
- **Brise:** Brise is a loa of the hills. He is boss of the woods. Brise is very fierce in appearance. He is very black and has very large proportions. Brise is actually a gentle soul and likes children. Brise lives in the chardette tree and sometimes assumes the form of an owl. Brise is a protectorate. He is strong and demanding and accepts speckled hens as sacrifices.
- **Congo:** A handsome but apathetic loa. Content with any clothing and eats mixed foods with much pimiento, and is fond of mixed drinks.
- **Congo Savanne:** A fierce petro loa. He is malevolent, fierce, and strong. Savanne eats people. He grinds them up as we would grind up corn. His color is white. He is a loa not to be messed with.
- **Dinclusin & Chalotte:** These two loa are among the French "mysteries." People mounted by these gods talk perfect French and seem to be unable to speak Creole normally or properly. Chalotte often demands upon the most defined forms of ritualistic protocol. Dinclusin can be recognized by his habit of pocketing everything given to him.
- **Dumballah (Dumballah Wedo, Damballah):** Known as the serpent god, he is one of the most popular. Dumballah is the father figure. He is benevolent, innocent, a loving father. He doesn't communicate well, as though his wisdom were too aloof for us. Dumballah is the snake. He plunges into a basin of water which is built for him, or climbs up into a tree. Being both snake and aquatic deity, he haunts rivers, springs, and marshes. Again, as the snake he is rather uncommunicative, but a loving quiet presence. Dumballah does not communicate exact messages, but seems to radiate a comforting presence which sort of sends a general spirit of optimism into all people present. Because of this, he is often sought after during ceremonies. When Dumballah mounts someone the special offering to him is the egg, which he crushes with his teeth. Dumballah is the serpent god, also lightning. He and his wife, Aida-Wedo, are often shown as two snakes who look as if they were diving into the sink and by a rainbow. He is the bringer of rain; this is a necessity for good crops. People possessed by him dart their tongues in and out, slither along the ground, and climb trees, or roof beams, falling like a boa. He is known to whistle because he has no speech. His special day is Thursday, and his favorite tree is the bougainvillea. White is his color. He is in charge of white metal (silver) and must be fed white food and drink. He grants riches and allows treasures to be discovered. Dumballah sustains the world and prevents it from disintegrating. Dumballah and his wife Ayida, represent human sexuality. He is sometimes referred to as Da. Dumballah is often spoken of as a serpent. In the voodoo culture, the serpent is a

The 8 Most Important Voodoo Gods

The *loa*, or major divine beings of Voodoo, or Vodun, are spirits who serve as intermediaries between man and Bondye, the supreme Voodoo god. The loa, or *Iwa*, appear in different families, including the Ghede, Petro, and Radha. They are typically considered lesser divine figures, with the supreme god being Bondye, the creator.

Enslaved people in Haiti and Louisiana syncretized their loa [with Catholic saints](#), and many of the loa have corresponding figures in Catholicism. They are called upon in ritual by Voodoo mambos or houngan, and are presented with offerings of food and drink before they are petitioned for assistance. In some African traditional religions, the orishas are worked with, in addition to or instead of the loa. The orishas are the human form of spirits found in the Yoruba belief systems.

Did You Know?

- The loa and orishas are the divine spirits found in Haitian Vodoun, New Orleans Voodoo, and a number of African traditional religions.
- Offerings are typically made to the loa, which includes food and drink, and they are honored in ritual when the mambo or houngan calls them to the ceremony.
- Each loa has a very specific set of demands that must be met before they will grant favors to petitioners.

Bondye

[Bondye is the creator god](#) found in the Voodoo religion, and the loa answer to him. The loa serve as intermediaries between man and Bondye, whose existence is far beyond human comprehension. Bondye is essentially unknowable to mankind, and doesn't meddle around in the affairs of mortals, so spiritual work is done with the loa instead.

Papa Legba

Legba fetish from Benin. *clara_cs / Getty Images*

Papa Legba is the loa associated with the crossroads, and he serves as an intermediary between man and the spirit world. Legba has evolved in numerous ways from his origins in Africa. In some places, he is seen as a fertility god, portrayed with a large erect phallus. In other customs, he is the trickster, or he may appear as a protector of children.

Papa Legba appears in many forms in New Orleans Voodoo and Haitian Vodou. Associated with the colors red and black, he is usually portrayed as an older man in a straw hat or old tattered clothing. Papa Legba walks with a cane, and is accompanied by a dog.

Maman Brigitte

In Haitian Voodoo, [Maman Brigitte](#) is a loa associated with death and the underworld. She is the consort of Baron Samedi, and is often represented by a black rooster. There is a theory that Maman Brigitte could be descended from Brigid, the Celtic goddess of the hearth fires and domestic life; those who support this say she must have made her way to Haiti with Scottish and Irish indentured servants when they left their homelands. Supporting this concept, Maman Brigitte is often portrayed as a light-skinned woman with red hair.

Baron Samedi

VeraPetruk / Getty Images Plus

The husband of Maman Brigitte, [Baron Samedi is the god of death](#), and is both respected and feared as the keeper of cemeteries. He often appears skeletal, wearing a top hat and formal tails, as well as dark glasses. In addition to being associated with death, he is also a god of resurrection—only Baron Samedi can welcome a soul to the realm of the dead.

He is known for outrageous and lewd behavior, swearing, and fornicating with women other than his wife. Baron Samedi is also the loa to call upon for work with ancestors long dead, and can cure any mortal wound—as long as the recipient is willing to pay his price. Baron Samedi is connected to powerful acts of magic, and is the leader of the Guede, the family of loa who work with the dead.

Erzulie

THONY BELZAIRE / AFP / Getty Images

Erzulie, the goddess of beauty and love, is the epitome of femininity and womanhood. According to Haitian professor [Leslie Desmangles, at Hartford's Trinity College](#), Erzulie: ... represents the cosmic womb in which divinity and humanity are conceived. She is the symbol of fecundity, the mother of the world who participates with the masculine forces in the creation and maintenance of the universe.

She appears in several different aspects, including Erzulie Dantòr and Mambo Erzulie Fréda Dahomey. Much like the Christian Lady of Sorrows, Erzulie often grieves for that which she cannot obtain, and sometimes leaves a ceremony weeping. She is sometimes depicted as a Black Madonna, and other times as an upper class light-skinned mixed-race woman bedecked in fine clothing and expensive jewelry. She and her family of loa can be called upon for matters related to motherhood, and strong feminine sexuality.

Ogun

AFP / Stringer / Getty Images

Ogun is one of the orisha who come to Voodoo from the Yoruba belief system, and is a god associated with warriors, blacksmiths, and the wheels of justice. It's said that if you make a sacrifice of meat to Ogun, you'll be blessed with a successful hunt. Practitioners of Haitian Vodou call upon Ogun for matters related to war and conflict, and make offerings of male animals — roosters and dogs in particular seem to be his favorite. He is [symbolized by an iron knife or machete](#), and has a fondness for pretty women and good rum.

Damballah

In Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo, [Damballah is one of the most important loa](#). He is the creator who helped the god Bondye make the cosmos, and is represented by a giant serpent. His coils shaped the heavens and earth, and he is the keeper of knowledge, wisdom, and healing magic. Interestingly, he is associated with Saint Patrick, who is said to have driven the snakes out of Ireland. Erzulie is his consort. Damballah moves between land and sea, and is a never ending force that represents the veneration of life. His female counterpart, Ayida-Weddo, forms the rainbow.

Oshun

Adalberto Roque / Getty Images

One of the Orishas, Oshun is a goddess connected to rivers, streams, and water. She is associated with beauty and sexuality, as well as love and pleasure. Often found in the Yoruba and Ifa belief systems, she is worshiped by her followers who leave offerings at river banks. Oshun is tied to wealth, and those who petition her for assistance can find themselves blessed with bounty and abundance.

possessed by him dart their tongues in and out, shimmer along the ground, and climb trees, or root beams, rattling like a boa. He is known to whistle because he has no speech. His special day is Thursday, and his favorite tree is the bougainvillea. White is his color. He is in charge of white metal (silver) and must be fed white food and drink. He grants riches and allows treasures to be discovered. Dumballah sustains the world and prevents it from disintegrating. Dumballah and his wife Ayida, represent human sexuality.

He is sometimes referred to as Da. Dumballah is often spoken of as a serpent. In the voodoo culture, the serpent is a symbol of fertility. He is one of the oldest of the ancestors and is so sacred that he doesn't speak, but expresses himself through hissing sounds, just like that of a serpent. In the voodoo religion Dumballah is closely associated with the Catholic's St. Patrick.

He is Dahomean in origin. His favorite foods are eggs, cornmeal, melons, rice, bananas, and grapes. The usual offering to him is a hen and a cock. It is believed that if respects are paid to him by a married couple, he will keep them happy.

- **Erzulie: (Ezili)** Voodoo does not have a woman as goddess of fertility. Fertility is regarded as a unified principle, equally held by male and female forces. Thus Dumballah is united to his Ayida. Agwe has his counterpart in La Sirene, the Marasa; the twins are contradictory and complementary forces of nature and so on. Erzulie is the female energy of Legba.

She has tremendous power and is feared as much as she is loved. Also, she has several different roles: goddess of the word, love, help, goodwill, health, beauty and fortune, as well as goddess of jealousy, vengeance, and discord. She is usually known as a serpent that coiled upon itself lives on water and bananas.

There is a casual connection between the lightness of her color and that of wealth, because only the light skinned elite possess wealth in Haiti.

But Voodoo has a most special place for Erzulie, the loa of beauty, the loa who is so uniquely human since she is the differentiating force between human and all other creation. She is the ability to conceptualize, the ability to dream, the artistic ability to create. She is the loa of ideality.

She is the female prototype of voodoo who represents the moon.

She is the most beautiful and sensuous lady in the voodoo pantheon. She is respected and wealthy; wears her hair long; is very jealous and requires her lovers to dedicate a room for her ritual lovemaking.

Erzulie is not a loa of elemental forces, but THE loa of ideal dreams, hopes and aspirations. As such she is the most loved loa of all. She is pale in appearance; almost white, even though she is Dahomean in origin. She is known as the earth mother, the goddess of love. She is depicted as a trembling woman who inhabits the water. She has no specific function, but is approachable in a confidential manner. In every sanctuary there is a room, or corner of a room, dedicated to her.

Erzulie is fabulously rich, and, when she mounts someone the first act is always to accomplish her elaborate toilette.

The very best of things which the houngan or mambo have are reserved for Erzulie. She will bathe, using soap still in a fresh wrapper if possible. She will dress in silks with fresh flowers and other signs of her femininity and specialness. Her sacred days are Tuesday and Thursday. She wears red and blue dresses and jewels. As soon as someone is possessed by her, they are washed and dressed in finery. She is a high class mulatto who walks with a saucy sway to her hips. She is a "woman of the world" and is fond of sugary drinks. She is compared to Aphrodite. She is pleasure-loving, extravagant and likes to give and get presents. She fond of men but mistrusts women as rivals. She is a woman of etiquette, and when she pretends to speak French, she purposely talks in a high pitched voice.

She is a master of coquetry. She may simply visit with her servants, or she may eat or drink with great delicacy. She loves to dance and is the most graceful of all the loa. She is quite special to men and will dance with them, kiss and caress them, even in an often embarrassing manner.

Yet she is closely associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary and her symbol is the heart, usually one broken with an arrow in much the same way as a dominant Catholic portrait of Mary has it.

Erzulie wears three wedding bands since she has been (or is) wedded to Dumballah, Ogoun and Agwe. She has often flirted with Zaka, but she has completely dismissed his more coarse brother Ghede as unworthy (since he is black and she is mulatto). However, Erzulie is always in charge and may take any servitor present as her lover for the day if she chooses.

However, the visit of Erzulie is never fully satisfying. In the end she always begins to weep. The world is just too much for her. At first people try to comfort her with more delicate food or drink or other gifts, but her tears continue to flow. It is this tearful and sad side of her that allows the women to accept her in her haughty ways. She is, in the end, one who suffers the burden of the world's sorrows.

Despite her flirtations and loving ways, Erzulie is a virgin. She is the complete converse of the crude sexuality of Papa Ghede. She may not be a virgin in the physical sense, but in the sense that her love transcends the earth, it is a love of higher forces. She belongs to the family of sea spirits, but has become completely divorced from her origins as to be now almost exclusively a personification of feminine grace and beauty.

- **Erzulie Jan Petro:** Violent spirit loa belonging to the Petro tradition. Jan Petro is called upon to take responsibility for the temple where spells are on display; although she is a neutral entity, when not called upon it is the duty of the devotees to make them behave peacefully or violently, depending on their motivation for dealing with the spirits. Jan Petro as a protector of temples is very powerful; when people come to the temple they soon find out. Jan Petro likes fresh air and water; she is a sea spirit. She likes perfume and lotion--any temple dedicated to her usually smells like lotion, for it is thrown on those things she possesses.
- **Ghede: (Papa Ghede)** Ghede is the eternal figure in black, controlling the eternal crossroads at which everyone must someday cross over. His symbol is the cross upon a tomb. Known as the spirit of death, other spirits fear him and try to avoid him. He operates under the direction of Baron Samedi. Baron Samedi represents the death side of Ghede (Guede). He talks through his nose, is cynical, jovial, and tells broad jokes. His language is full of the unexpected. His tools are the pick, the hoe, and the spade. He is the power behind the magic that kills. He controls the souls of those who have met death as a result of magic. When he appears (mounting someone at an invoking ceremony), he wears a pair of dark glasses, from which he knocks out the right lens: for with his right eye he watches those present, lest anyone steal his food. Of especial interest is the testimony of Ghede; for when this god mounts his carriers, they are bereft of any sense of self, behave and speak compulsively, and recover knowing nothing of what they did or said. Loa of death, sexuality, and keeper of the cemeteries. He is enamored of women, makes constant use of obscene words and songs, and performs obscene dances. When someone is mounted by Guede they put on a black undertaker's coat, a black top hat and stuff cotton in their ears and noses, this to symbolize a dead person. After they are dressed up they must then perform the banda dance, an erotic dance in which one imitates the movements of copulation. The Guedes live in cemeteries and visit Catholic churches at night. On November 2 the faithful visit cemeteries and light candles in honor of Baron Samedi. Papa Guede is a much loved loa because his appearance always brings laughter and joy, singing and dancing; he is usually the last to appear at a ceremony. He is the loa of death and resurrection; is known as a total clown; loves cigarettes; is often seen smoking two at a time. He is neither good nor evil, but he is amused by humans and that's why he jokes around so much. Ghede is sort of to the underworld or afterlife what Legba is to life--he who controls access. Ghede controls access to everything in the afterlife. We are reminded by him that our understanding of death and life is limited and that both are beyond our comprehension. Ghede is also god of eroticism. Eroticism is beyond good and evil since it is inevitable. Ghede is neither delighted by eroticism, and certainly not shamed by it. If anything, Ghede is amused by the universal presence of eroticism and humans' constant need to pretend that it is other than what it is. It is believed that his obscenity in sexual matters is an affirmation of life in the midst of death. Saturday is his day and his color is black. His favorite foods are salt herring, hot peppers, roasted corn, and roasted bananas, and he is known for stealing food and hiding it, and then demanding more. Black goats and chickens are the animal sacrifices made to him during the rituals. When Ghede mounts someone he often singles out people who pretend to be aloof from eroticism. He ridicules them, embarrasses them, exposes them (in more ways than one). He is especially hard on whites since they often have the puritanical sexual attitudes of western culture. Ghede is also often called **BARON SAMEDI**. In this aspect he is *DEATH*. He is the keeper of the cemetery and the primary contact with the dead. Anyone who would seek contact with the dead must first contact and solicit Ghede/Baron Samedi in the same way that Legba is contacted to cross over to the spirit world. Ghede has a ravenous appetite for food and drink and doesn't mind manifesting them when he mounts someone. He has a dread of fire and shares the characteristic of a nasal voice with zombies. Ghede is a clown, an interrupter, a coarse fellow. He wears formal black attire and a high silk hat with dark glasses and a cane. He smokes cigarettes and drinks rum. Likes to mount young girls. When he is pleased, he's quite a clown, but hard to handle when angered. But he is history too. As keeper of the cemetery he has intimate contact with the dead. He knows what their plans were, what's going on in families, what the connections of things are. And he is quite generous with his information. Even when he is clowning or performing his erotic antics, if you can pull him aside and ask him a serious question you will get a serious and reliable answer. Another of Ghede's great powers is as the protector of children. Ghede generally does not like to see children die. They need a full life. Thus he is the loa to go to when seeking help for a sick child. Ghede has the power over zombies and decides whether or not people can be changed into animals. Any such black magic voodoo must seek the help of Baron Samedi/Ghede with these tasks. Lastly, since Ghede is the lord of death, he is also the last resort for healing since he must decide whether to accept the sick person into the dead or allow them to recover.
- **Gran Boa:** Lives in the deep forest where the vegetation is wild. He is the protector of wildlife, and doesn't like to be seen. He eats fruits and vegetables all day in the woods and when called in a ceremony, he is usually not hungry but the people always have food for him anyway. He is the loa that must be called upon before one is ordained into

Photo by / [Voodoo / Getty Images](#)

One of the Orishas, Oshun is a goddess connected to rivers, streams, and water. She is associated with beauty and sexuality, as well as love and pleasure. Often found in the Yoruba and Ifa belief systems, she is worshiped by her followers who leave offerings at river banks. Oshun is tied to wealth, and those who petition her for assistance can find themselves blessed with bounty and abundance.

Oshun's colors include orange and golden yellow, as well as green and coral. Offerings to her can include fresh cinnamon, honey, and pumpkins. Many of her followers keep their altar to Oshun in the bedroom.

From <<https://www.learnreligions.com/voodoo-gods-4771674>>

voodoo priesthood.

- **Grande Ezili:** An old woman, crippled with rheumatism and she is only able to walk by dragging herself along on the ground with a stick.
- **Ibo Lele:** He is independent and hateful; proud of himself and ambitious. He likes to be exclusively served and doesn't like to associate with the other loa. He relies heavily on the people for his food, but the people are never certain what kind of food he is likely to eat.
- **Jean Petro:** Jean Petro is a deformation of Don Pedro, the name of the Spanish slave. Jean Petro is the spirit-leader of a group of strong and violent spirits called petro. The difference between the good loa (rada) and the evil loa (petro) is still far and wide. Voodoo services are rarely held for petro loa; however, they still do occur but most services are for family and rada loa. Some say that Jean Petro was brought about by Don Pedro who was a Negro slave of Spanish origin. He acquired much influence by being denounced as the instigator of some alarming plots to overthrow the government. Because of this he symbolizes resistance, force, uprisings, and a sort of black power ideology.
- **Kalfu (Carrefour, Kalfou):** Legba is twined with his Petro opposite. Kalfu too controls the crossroads. Actually, were it not for him the world would be more rational, a better place. But, not unlike Pandora in Greek religion and myth, Kalfu controls the evil forces of the spirit world. He allows the crossing of bad luck, deliberate destruction, misfortune, injustice.

Kalfu controls the in-between points of the crossroads, the off-center points.
Legba controls the positive spirits of the day. Kalfu controls the malevolent spirits of the night.
Yet Kalfu can control these evil spirits too. He is strong and tall, muscular. People do not speak in his presence. When he mounts a person everyone at the service stops speaking because he allows evil loa to come to the ceremony. He claims that most of the important loa know him and he collaborates with them. Kalfu says that some people claim he is a demon but he denies this. He is a respected loa and he is not liked much.
He is the grand master of charms and sorceries and is closely associated with black magic. Ceremonies are often held at the crossroads.
The origin of darkness. The moon is his symbol. He can be placated, but is a very violent and dangerous loa.
Kalfu is similar to Pandora in that he controls the gate comings and goings of bad spirits. He controls the off-center points of the crossroads.
He has knowledge of the human condition and develops ways to help individuals cope with their problems. He has experience dealing with all kinds of people. Kalfu is a magician and likes to use tree leaves in his magic. He has the ability to change people into animals and then control their minds.
- **Krabinay:** Krabinay loa are petro loa. They dress all in red and do high impressive jumps. People are warned away from Krabinay. However, they are very tough and can offer a great deal of assistance to a houngan. These loa behave in a truly devilish way. Possessions induced by them are so violent that spectators are advised to keep their distance. They take pleasure in cynicism. However, they undertake treatment of desperate cases. Despite their admission of creation by God they avoid mentioning his name.
- **Legba:** Old man who guards the crossroads. He is the origin of life, so he must be saluted each time a service or any other activity with the loa will begin. Legba controls the crossing over from one world to the other. He is the contact between the worlds of spirit and of flesh.

He can deliver messages of gods in human language and interpret their will. He is the god of destiny and is also the intermediary between human beings and divine gods.
Legba is one of the most important loa in Haitian voodoo. He is the first loa to be called in a service, so that he can open the gates to the spirit world and let them communicate with other loa. No loa dares show itself without Legba's permission. Whoever has offended him finds himself unable to address his loa and is deprived of their protection. He is the origin and the male prototype of voodoo.
Voodooists believe that if Legba grants their wishes, they can contact the forces of the universe.
He is the guardian of voodoo temples, courtyards, plantations, and crossroads. He protects the home. If you are going on a trip, it is believed that you pray to Legba for protection from harm and a safe return home.
As "Master of Crossroads" he is the god of every parting of the way--a favorite haunt of evil spirits and propitious to magic devices; and it is at crossroads that he receives the homage of sorcerers and presides over their incantations and spells.
He is also the guardian of the pote mitan--the center post--a post in the center of a peristyle regarded as a thoroughfare of the spirits. The pote-mitan is an extremely sacred object. Legba walks in his bare feet because he is in constant contact with the earth.
He is a small crooked lovable old man. Small pipe with little tobacco, a little food in his macoute sack. Sores on his body. His pitiful appearance has earned him the nickname of Legba of the Broken Foot but conceals the terrific strength which becomes apparent in the violence of possession induced by him.
Because of his politeness and caring nature he is greeted as Papa Legba. He is a much loved loa.
His favorite foods are vegetables, meat and tubules grilled on a fire. These foods will be offered to him so that he will open the gates. His symbol is the sun and all that is good. His sacred day is Tuesday. His favorite tree is the mediciner-bebi.
When he mounts someone the person's limbs are twisted and horrible to see. The crutch is the symbol of Legba. The outward appearance of Legba hides a very powerful interior.
Legba is the symbol of the sun, of daylight, of things positive. Legba controls the cardinal points of the crossroads. The interpreter to the gods can deliver the messages of the gods in human language and interpret their will. He is the god of destiny, honored first at every ceremony, receiving first offerings. He is represented by a wooden or iron phallus mounted in a little mound of earth in front of every house.
Legba is also known to hold the "key of the spiritual world", and for this reason is identified with the Christian St. Peter.
Legba's colors are green, rose, and red.
- **Lemba:** is symbolized by an iron bar.
- **Linglessu:** This is one of the loa free masons. When feeding this loa, all meat prepared for him must be liberally salted. He prefers the ends of the tongue, ears, front teeth, and the end of a tail of a goat. When this loa mounts somebody, it is violent and his voice is highly distorted.
- **Linto:** The child spirit of the Guede family. He induces childish behavior in those he rides. They walk clumsily, much like a baby who hardly knows how to use his legs. They babble and cry for food. The company Linto is in teases him but only in good humor.
- **Loco (Loko)** is the spirit of vegetation and guardian of sanctuaries. Mainly associated with trees. He gives healing properties to leaves; the god of healing and patron of the herbs doctors who always invoke him before undertaking a treatment. Offerings are placed in straw bags which are then hung in its branches. He is only recognizable by the pipe smoked by his servant and the stick which he carries in his hand. His favorite colors are red and white. Animals that are most likely to be offered to this god are black or white goats or russet colored oxen.

Portrayed in the form of a butterfly, Loco has an extensive knowledge of pharmaceutical uses of herbs. It is said that Houngans and Mambos receive their knowledge from Loco.
He is known for his good judgment; often during conflicts he is called in to be judge. He is known for his intolerance of injustice. It has been said that he transforms into the wind and listens to people without them knowing he is there. Loco has many wives and girlfriends who are young and good-looking all over the country wherever there is vegetation.
He is the personification of the trees he is so closely associated with.
Loco is compared to an invisible houngan with authority over all the sanctuaries in Haiti. The worship of Loco is much like the worship of trees--mainly the Ceiba. The Ceiba tree is the Antillean silk-cotton tree and the tallest species in Haiti. Offerings to it are put in straw bags and hung from the branches.
It is hard to distinguish Loco when he has mounted someone since he is the personification of plants.
Loco is also a messenger loa and communication loa, but his main duties are the vegetation in the woods and forests. He also watches over the agricultural tools peasants use in their every day activities.
The voodoo physician priests worship him, getting their knowledge from him.
- **Marasa:** Twins who died in their early childhood and are innocent and capricious. They are thought to be orphans with no discipline in terms of good eating habits. They eat from twin plates and they eat all of what they are offered at once, always coming very hungry to the ceremonies. They must be fed until they are content and then they will listen to the people. They have a reputation for doing harm to those who have forgotten to provide food or who have not kept their promises, but also refuse to take responsibility for any wrong doing or illnesses.
- **Marinette-Bwa-Chech:** Literally "Marinette of the dry arms." This is a petro loa or an evil spirit. Worship of her is not spread all over Haiti but is growing rapidly in southern parts. Her ceremonies are held under a tent and lit with a huge fire in which salt and petrol are thrown.

She is most dreaded; a she-devil; the sworn servant of evil. She is respected by werewolves, who hold services in her honor. She is an agent of the underhand dealings of Kita who is, herself, an outstanding loa sorceress.
The screeching owl is the emblem of Marinette. When she mounts someone they behave as an owl, hooking their fingers, lowering their heads and scratching.
After mounting people, she talks of eating people and confesses hideous crimes. At the end the houngan and the possessed alike jump in the fire and stamp it out. For sacrifice she is offered chickens that have been plucked alive, goats and sows. However, no one can touch these animals while preparing them; they must also be buried. Marinette is the mistress of Petro-e-rouge and wife to Ti-Jean-pied-sec.
She wanders the woods and goes to her secret place where the offerings she shares with no one are left.
- **Obatala:** Obatala is a sky loa. He is the loa responsible for forming children in the womb. Thus, Obatala is responsible for birth defects. He is also called king of the white cloth, and all his followers wear white. Obatala's favorite food is edible snails.
- **Ogoun (Ogorin, Ogu-badagri)** Ogoun is the traditional warrior figure in Dahomean religion. He is quite similar to the spirit Zeus in Greek religion/mythology. As such Ogoun is mighty, powerful, triumphal. In more recent time

Ogoun has taken on a new face which is not quite related to his African roots. This is the crafty and powerful political leader. However, this political warrior is much more of an image of where struggle is in modern Haiti.

Originally, he was the god of blacksmithing; however, now that blacksmithing has become obsolete, he has become the warrior loa.

He can give strength through prophecy and magic. It is Ogoun (Ogu) who is said to have planted the idea and led and given power to the slaves to the 1804 revolt and freedom. He is called now to help people obtain a government more responsible to their needs.

He is of the Nago loa family. This loa loves the noise of battle itself and this is most likely why he is the voodoo religion's master of lightning and storm. By Nado tradition Shango has these loa duties. Ogu-badagri by voodoo hymn, "throws" lightning and thunder.

His symbol in humfo is a sabre stuck in the earth in front of the altar. His past follows him in that "Ogu's forge" is the name given to an iron rod stuck in a brazier which represents him.

Ogoun comes to mount people in various aspects of his character, but the people are quite familiar with each of them. Some of these aspects are:

Ogoun the wounded warrior. Here he even assumes a Christ-figure pose which the people know well from their Christian associations.

As Ogoun Feraille he gives strength to the servitors by slapping them on the thighs or back.

As Ogoun Badagris he may lift a person up and carry him or her around to indicate his special attention and patronage.

But in all the aspects of Ogoun there is the dominant theme of power and militancy. He represents a veteran of the "time of bayonets."

His possessions can sometimes be violent. Those mounted by him are known to wash their hands in flaming rum without suffering from it later. They are never given water; they are more like "teased" with water. They dress up in red dolman and French kepi and wave a saber or machete, chew a cigar and demand rum in an old phrase "Gren mwe fret" (my testicles are cold).

At times, the loa Ogu interprets Dumballah's messages.

If he is properly persuaded, he will protect his petitioners from bullets and weapon wounds.

He is covered with iron and immune to fire and bullets. To make him more comfortable the congregation serves him white rum. Ogou's symbol is a piece of iron, which he uses to fight his enemies. He is a respected loa.

Ogoun is the deity of fire and "metallurgical elements" and red is his color. Therefore, he likes animals that are red to be offered to him; for example, red or russet pigs or roosters. He likes to be saluted with rum, not with the more traditional water. Often this rum is poured on the ground then lit and the flames pervade the peristyle.

The sword, or much more commonly, the machete is his weapon and he often does strange feats of poking himself with it, or even sticking the handle in the ground, then mounting the blade without piercing his skin.

The members of this family are great drinkers, but alcohol has no effect on them.

Ogoun is identified with St. Jacques, the warrior general, and is often in the guise of a revolutionary war general. He likes cigars and rum. He has a passion for fire and likes the women. He's the spirit of fire and water.

His favorite tree is the mango tree. His favorite day is Wednesday.

- **Petite Pierre:** is a gluttonous and quarrelsome spirit who tries to pick fights with the audience.
- **Petro:** Comes from a new nation of spirits forged directly in the steel and blood of the colonial era. They reflect all the rage, violence and delirium that threw off shackles of slavery. The drums, dancing, and rhythm are offbeat sharp, and unforgiving, like the crack of a rawhide whip. The Bizango is an extreme form of the Petro and it is sometimes described as the wild Petro. Bizango occurs by night, in darkness that is the province of the djab, the devil.
- **Rada:** The loa that represents the emotional stability and warmth of Africa, the hearth of the nation. Rada derived almost directly from the Dahomean deity is highly religious in nature; rite is never celebrated without the performance of Mahi dances and without honoring and invocation of Nago gods. The Rada drumming and dancing is on beat whereas the Petro is offbeat. Rada stands for light and the normal affairs of humanity.
- **Simbi: (Simba, Simbe, Simbi Andezo)** is guardian of the fountains and marshes and cannot do without the freshness of water. Voodoo rituals are held near springs. Several of their songs mention these sorts of places. He is a very knowledgeable loa because he spends a lot of time learning about the nature of illnesses of supernatural origin and how to treat them. He is either with you or against you by protecting those who have good relations with him and turning his back on those who do not. As part of Ogou's army he is the chief of the coast guard and goes wherever he pleases.
He is the petro loa of the coast; one of the respected members of the petro family. He belongs to rada because of his nature. Sometimes neglected by their devotees and gnawed by hunger, he tends to be cruel.
He lives in springs and rivers. He cannot stand being away from water; children who go to fetch water at springs run the risk-- particularly if they are fair-skinned--of being kidnapped to work for him under the water for a few years, gifting them with second sight for their trouble.
- **Siren and Whale:** These two loa are marine divinities, so closely linked that they are always worshipped together and celebrated in the same songs. Some people say the Whale is the mother of the Siren, others that he is her husband; others say they are used for one and the same deity. Popular opinion says the Siren is married to Agwe. When Siren turns up in a sanctuary, the person possessed by her appears simply in the role of a young coquette most careful of her looks, and speaking in French, often offending the peasant serviteurs. Both the Siren and the Whale are often viewed as "upper class."
- **Sobo (Sobo Kessou):** Loa of strength. Sobo is a very powerful loa and well known for his bravery as a warrior. When he possesses someone, that person must dress up like a general in the army. When he addresses the congregation during a mounting it is like a general addressing his troops. Sobo is considered an important figure in voodoo mythology. He is the symbol of strength, the ideal of voodoo priests who want to be respected figures in their communities. Because of the strength he procures for his followers, Sobo's presence is continually requested to bring security and protection to the congregation. He who is with Sobo is protected against wild spirits.
Sobo is said to have healing power and is often called upon to cure illness of the supernatural origin to his devotees. He dines upon goat meat and mutton, and often lives under trees. His servitors wear kerchiefs of white and lemon, his favorite colors.
- **Sogbo (Soybo):** He is the god of lightning and the protector of flags. Sogbo is the brother of the three-horned Bosu. Sogbo is always accompanied by his companion Bade, who is the loa of the winds. These loa share functions with Agau, who is also a storm loa.
When possessed by Sogbo, one hurls down polished stones which are piously collected and used as symbols of the loa. Despite their divine origins, thunderstones are not uncommon in Haiti. The spirit hurls a lightning bolt to the earth, striking a rock outcropping and casting the stone to the valley floor. There it must lie for a year and a day before the houngan may touch it.
- **Taureau-trois-graines:** His name means bull with three testicles. This loa is a product of the fanciful imagination of the people in Haiti and is considered a Creole loa. He is the great loa of the Jacmel region. His appearances are terrible; people possessed by him are seized with destructive rage and create havoc all round unless appeased by the offer of a handful of grass. This they munch at once. During trance, they bellow ceaselessly.
- **Ti-Jean-Petro:** This is a black magic or "petro" loa that is depicted as a dwarf with one foot. Even though Ti-Jean-Petro has a French name, his roots can be traced back to Africa. He is easily comparable to a spirit that roamed through the bush. This spirit, too, was depicted as having only one leg. This loa often protects and assists black magic sorcerers. Ti-Jean-Petro also is recognized under the names of Petro-e-rouge, Ti-Jean-pied-fin, Prince Zandor, and Ti-Jean-Zandor. He has a violent and passionate nature that becomes apparent when he mounts people.

From <<http://faculty.webster.edu/corbetree/haiti/voodoo/biglist.htm>>

Marie Laveau

April 29, 2023 7:51 PM

The True Story Of Marie Laveau, The Infamous Voodoo Priestess Of 1800s New Orleans

By Gina Dimuro | Edited By John Kuroski

Published June 6, 2021

Updated April 7, 2022

Marie Laveau is famous for being New Orleans' voodoo queen, but was she really as evil and mystical as she has been portrayed?

In 19th-century New Orleans, Marie Laveau proved that Voodoo was much more than sticking pins in dolls and raising zombies. While the white world dismissed her as an evil occultist who practiced black magic and held drunken orgies, New Orleans' Black community knew her as a healer and herbalist who preserved African belief systems while melding them with those of the New World.

For decades, Marie Laveau would hold spiritual ceremonies of healing and faith in New Orleans' Congo Square every Sunday. A gathering place for the city's oppressed Blacks who weren't allowed to congregate in public on most other days, Congo Square on Sundays provided their one chance for community.

And though Marie Laveau's Voodoo ceremonies allowed worshippers to practice their faith, the whites literally spying from the trees nearby reported sensationalized accounts of "occult drunken orgies" and dismissed Laveau as an evil witch. But the true story of Marie Laveau is much richer and more nuanced than the inflammatory myths that have persisted for more than a century.

Marie Laveau's Origins Before Becoming The Storied Priestess Of New Orleans



Wikimedia CommonsMarie Laveau

Born around 1801, Marie Laveau came from a family who reflected New Orleans' rich, complicated history. Her mother, Marguerite, was a freed slave whose great-grandmother had been [born in West Africa](#). Her father, Charles Laveaux, was a multiracial businessman who bought and sold real estate and slaves.

According to Laveau's [New York Times obituary](#), she briefly married Jacques Paris "a carpenter of her own color." But when Paris mysteriously disappeared, she entered a relationship with a white Louisianan who hailed from France, Captain Christophe Dominique Glapion.

Though Laveau and Glapion lived together for 30 years — and had at least seven children together — they were probably never officially married due to anti-miscegenation laws. In any case, Marie Laveau was known for more in New Orleans than being a wife and mother.

Well-loved and well respected in the city, Laveau habitually hosted New Orleans' "lawyers, legislators, planters, and merchants" at her home between Rampart and Burgandy streets. She doled out advice, offered her opinion on current events, helped the sick, and hosted anyone visiting town.

"[Her] narrow room heard as much wit and scandal as any of the historical *salons* of Paris," The New York *Times* wrote in her obituary. "There were businessmen who would not send a ship to sea before consulting her upon the probabilities of the voyage."

But Marie Laveau was more than — as The New York *Times* called her — "one of the most wonderful women who ever lived." She was also a "Voodoo Queen" who oversaw ceremonies in New Orleans.

How The "Voodoo Queen" Persevered Against Racism



Flickr CommonsVisitors leave offerings on Marie Laveau's grave in hopes she will grant them small requests.

Marie Laveau's status as a "Voodoo Queen" was no secret in 19th-century New Orleans. Newspapers of her day called her "the head of the Voudou women," the "Queen of the Voudous," and the "Priestess of the Voudous." But what did the Queen of the Voodooos actually do?

Laveau, who likely learned about Voodoo from her family or African neighbors, filled her home with altars, candles, and flowers. She invited people — both Black and white — to attend Friday meetings where they prayed, sang, danced, and chanted.

As Queen, Marie Laveau would have also led more elaborate ceremonies, like on the Eve of St. John the Baptist. Then, along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain, she and others would have lit bonfires, danced, and dove into sacred bodies of water.

But though people of all races visited Laveau and attended her ceremonies, many white people never accepted Voodoo as a legitimate religion. White people who witnessed rituals sometimes sensationalized them, and stories spread outside New Orleans that described Voodoo as a dark art.

Indeed, white Protestants saw it as devil worship. And some Black clergy saw Voodooism as a backward religion that might impede racial progress in the United States after the Civil War.

Even *The New York Times*, which wrote a fairly glowing obituary for Laveau, wrote: "To the superstitious creoles, Marie appeared as a dealer in the black arts and a person to be dreaded and avoided."

The Historic Legacy Of Marie Laveau

In all, Marie Laveau did much more during her life than lead Voodoo ceremonies. She performed notable acts of community service, such as nursing yellow fever patients, posting bail for free women of color, and visiting condemned prisoners to pray with them in their final hours.

When she died on June 15, 1881, she was largely celebrated by newspapers in New Orleans and beyond. Some, however, danced around the question of whether or not she had ever practiced Voodoo. Others disparaged her as a sinful woman who'd led "midnight orgies."

And after her death in 1881, her legend only continued to grow. Was Marie Laveau a Voodoo Queen? A good Samaritan? Or both?

"The secrets of her life, however, could only be obtained from the old lady herself," *The New York Times* wrote. "[But] she would never tell the smallest part of what she knew and now her lids are closed forever."

Many mysteries remain about Marie Laveau. But what is certain is that her rise wouldn't have been possible anywhere but New Orleans.

From <<https://allthatsinteresting.com/marie-laveau>>

Voodoo Zombies

April 29, 2023 7:53 PM

The Truth Behind Haitian Voodoo Zombie Practices

Haitian [Voodoo](#) (or Vodou) is a [religion](#) unlike any other. And while zombies are not necessarily a mainstay of Haitian Voodoo, many practitioners believe that (like many other [Voodoo stories](#)) these tales of [zombies](#) are real - and there's even evidence to suggest that there is some truth to the Haitian zombie mythology. The history of zombies existing in Haiti began when the first slaves were brought over from Africa by French colonialists. The origins of these zombies began as a manifestation of the anxieties brought on by slavery, and over generations have evolved into something much more. Here is the truth behind Haitian zombies - without all the sensationalism often found in movies.

• Becoming A Zombie Is Brutal



Photo: [shankar s.](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / [CC BY 2.0](#)

The process of [zombification](#) begins when a bokor selects a victim and administers the zombie powder to them. This administration can vary from ingestion to injection, or even a blow dart. Once the powder takes effect, the victim enters a state of death-like paralysis in which they are still conscious. After being pronounced dead, they then bear witness to their own burial.

To prevent asphyxiation, the bokor must dig up the body within eight hours of the burial. It is at this point that the zombie ritual begins. The bokor starts by capturing the ti bon ange of the victim, which puts the gros bon ange and the body under his control. He then keeps the ti bon ange in a small clay jar or some other container, wraps it in a piece of the person's clothes, and stores it for safe keeping.

A day or two later, the bokor revives their now-zombie using another powder mixture called "zombie cucumber." This hallucinogenic concoction is used periodically to keep the victim in a state of submissive confusion. The bokor can then easily control the zombie, and usually puts them to work farming and laboring. Only when the bokor dies (or voluntarily relinquishes control) can the zombie return to their place of burial to rest in peace.

• The Haitian Voodoo Zombie Is Basically A Body Without A Soul



Photo: Jean-noël Lafargue / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / [Free Art License](#)

Distinct from the reanimated corpses found in George A. Romero lore (think *Night of the Living Dead*), the [Haitian voodoo zombie](#) is not actively rotting, nor does it feel compelled to consume the flesh of the living. Basically, in the Haitian Voodoo religion, a [bokor](#) (or sorcerer) can capture the soul of a recently deceased person and reanimate their body. This mindless, soulless body is usually then given menial tasks to perform for the bokor.

• The Zombie Is Created Using "Zombie Powder"



Photo: Universal Pictures / Fair Use

During the zombification ritual, a bokor uses a complex powder referred to as "[coup de poudre](#)," or powder strike, made from a variety of ingredients usually including a species of puffer fish, a marine toad, a hyla tree frog, and human remains. The inclusion of the puffer fish is particularly important because it produces a deadly neurotoxin called tetrodotoxin. This toxin creates paralysis and death, and the victims usually remain conscious until right before the moment of death. Additionally, there have been documented cases where people who have ingested tetrodotoxin appeared dead but went on to make a full recovery.

• The Horrors Of Slavery Are Manifested In The Zombie



Photo: Unknown / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / Public Domain

The roots of the [zombie mythology](#) began with the experiences of African slaves being transported to the French colony of Saint-Domingue in modern Haiti. Life on the sugar plantations there wasn't good, to say the least, and half of the slaves ended up being worked to death within a few years of their arrival, which created a perpetual need for fresh bodies. So, it isn't surprising that, within the Voodoo religion, a version of Hell would be created that involved continuing this toll after death into eternity: enter the zombie.

Slaves brought with them the roots of voodoo tradition, the origins of which can be traced back to nearly 6,000 years ago in West Africa. The French then forced them to convert to Christianity, causing the interesting combination of Catholicism and pagan tradition that is associated with Voodoo today. The horrors of slavery and the anxieties held by a group of people under constant threat of death were woven into the Voodoo religion, including the zombie belief itself.

• Clairvius Narcisse Was Supposedly A Real Hatian Zombie



Photo: [Stefan Krasowski](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / CC BY 2.0

In 1980, a vacant-eyed man approached Angelina Narcisse in a market, claiming to be her brother, [Clairvius Narcisse](#). The strange thing was that Angelina had buried her brother Clairvius in 1962. The man in front of her claimed to have been resurrected by a witch doctor and was enslaved on a sugar plantation for the last 18 years.

In 1962, Clairvius had checked into Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Desjardins, Haiti, complaining of body aches and a fever. His condition rapidly deteriorated and within a few days, he was declared dead by doctors. According to the Clairvius who reappeared in 1980, he remembered the whole ordeal, including the doctors pulling the sheet over his face - except he was paralyzed, not dead. He was awake as he was nailed into his coffin and buried.

Clairvius was able to answer questions that only he would know, and his identity was confirmed by several family members. The purported reason for his prolonged absence was due to a two-year enslavement as a zombie by a bokor. However, after the bokor died, Clairvius remained in hiding as he believed that his brother had sold him to the bokor over a land dispute. It was only after his brother's death that he decided to return.

• Voodoo Beliefs About Death Play A Major Role



Photo: [shankar s.](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / CC BY 2.0

In [Voodoo](#), it is believed that a person's soul is divided into two basic parts: the *ti bon ange* (little good angel) and the *gros bon ange* (big good angel). The gros bon ange is responsible for a person's life force and their bodily functions, while the ti bon ange is responsible for a person's consciousness and identity.

It is believed that the ti bon ange remains with the body for nine days after death, at which point it is released to face God and account for its sins. Meanwhile, the gros bon ange [remains on earth](#), where it haunts the places where its body lived until a proper burial ritual has been performed.

• Feeding A Zombie Salt Breaks The Curse



Photo: [Stefan Krasowski](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / CC BY 2.0

Allegedly, if you [feed a zombie salt](#) it will restore them to their original sensibilities. They will then be compelled to promptly kill the bokor who enslaved them - can you blame them? Once their revenge is complete, they will return to their place of burial to enjoy their "final" death.

• Even Within Voodoo Communities Zombies Are Rare



Photo: [Thom Quine](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

One would be wrong to assume that zombies are a common occurrence in the [Voodoo religion](#). On the contrary - many Voodoo practitioners don't even believe that zombies are literally real. Many believe that they are simply folk tales or metaphors. However, others remain steadfast in their belief that zombies do exist, and actively fear being turned into one. It is in this way that the zombie mythology is used as a way to maintain social order within the Voodoo religious community. Succinctly put, you really don't want to get on the wrong side of a bokor.

• The Term Zombie Is Derived From The Word "Nzambi"



Photo: [User:Doron](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

This Kongo word literally means, "spirit of a dead person." However, [others say](#) that the term zombie may instead be derived from the West African word "jumbie," which means ghost. Maybe it's a combination of both.

• Max Beauvoir, The "Pope of Voodoo," Introduced The West To Zombie Powder



Photo: [Fritz Rudolf Loewa](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Max Beauvoir, who passed away in 2015 at the age of 79, had long been known as the most powerful and [famous Voodoo priest](#) in all of Haiti. He was the head of Haiti's houngans (Voodoo priests) and is credited with committing several amazing feats.

One of his more concrete accomplishments was talking down angry lynch mobs who blamed houngans for the 2010 cholera outbreak (though many Voodoo priests were lynched before he was able to intercede). He is also credited with stopping an American invasion of Haiti and bewitching former President Bill Clinton, whom met with Beauvoir in 1975.

In the west, however, he is best known for his role in helping Wade Davis conduct the research that would appear in the book and later the movie, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*.

• Voodoo Zombies Were The Focus Of 'The Serpent And The Rainbow'



Photo: Universal Pictures / Fair Use

This [book](#), which was later adapted into a [movie](#), chronicles the experiences of ethnobiologist Wade Davis as he explored the truth behind Haitian zombie mythology. After the strange case of Clairvius Narcisse made global headlines, Davis was sent to investigate. In Haiti, he met with Voodoo priest Max Beavoir, who put him in touch with a bokor who frequently performed zombification rituals. Davis [theorized](#) that it was the use of some kind of chemical that resulted in Narcisse's apparent resurrection and disoriented state. Davis observed the creation of the zombie powder, which he came to believe was the chief agent responsible for the phenomenon. When combined with the psychological aspects of the ritual, he thought that this could easily be responsible for creating the mental slave, otherwise known as a zombie.

• Voodoo Created The Original Zombies



Photo: Unknown / [Wikimedia Commons](#) / Public Domain

In the *Night of the Living Dead*, the creatures are never actually referred to as zombies. Instead, they are called ghouls. The reason for this is that the term zombie already referred to something else: the [Haitian voodoo zombie](#). Later, due to the obvious similarities, the term started being applied to Romero's ghouls. Since the 1600s, the Voodoo religion has believed in zombies, though a romanticized version was eventually presented to the public in the classic film [White Zombie](#). The key point though is that, unlike modern zombies, voodoo zombies aren't scary. Instead, people are way more scared of *becoming* a zombie than of running into one.

From <<https://www.ranker.com/list/history-and-stories-from-haitian-zombie-voodoo-mythology/christopher-myers>>

Clairvius Narcisse

April 29, 2023 7:55 PM

Clairvius Narcisse

| Clairvius Narcisse | |
|--------------------|--|
| Born | January 2, 1922 <div>L'Estère</div> |
| Died | 1994 (aged 71–72) |
| Resting place | L'Estère |
| Nationality | Haitian |
| Other names | The living Zombie |
| Known for | Allegedly being a zombie |



Clairvius Narcisse (January 2, 1922 – 1994) was a Haitian man who claimed to have been turned into a [zombie](#) by a [Haitian voodoo](#), and forced to work as a slave. The hypothesis for Narcisse's account was that he had been administered a combination of psychoactive substances (often the paralyzing [pufferfish](#) venom [tetrodotoxin](#) and the strong deliriant [Datura](#)), which rendered him helpless and seemingly dead. The greatest proponent of this possibility was [Wade Davis](#), a graduate student in [ethnobotany](#) at [Harvard University](#), who published two popular books based on his travels and ideas during and immediately following his graduate training. However, subsequent examinations (using tools of [analytical chemistry](#) alongside critical review of earlier reports) have failed to support the presence of the key active compounds in the supposed zombie preparation, which was central to the phenomenon and mechanism reported by Davis.

Biography

Narcisse admitted himself to the Schweitzer Hospital (operated by American medical staff) in [Deschapelles](#), Haiti, on April 30, 1962.^[1] He had a [fever](#) and [fatigue](#), and was spitting up blood.^[1] Doctors could find no explanation for his symptoms, which gradually grew worse until he appeared to die three days later. He was pronounced dead, and held in cold storage for about a day before burial.^[1]

In 1980, a man identifying himself as Clairvius Narcisse approached Angelina Narcisse in the city of [L'Estère](#), convincing her and several other villagers of his identity by using a childhood nickname and sharing intimate family information.^{[2][1]} He claimed that he had been conscious but paralyzed during his supposed death and burial, and had subsequently been removed from his grave and forced to work at a [sugar plantation](#).^[1]

Per his account, after his apparent death and subsequent burial on May 2, 1962, his coffin was exhumed and he was given a paste possibly made from [datura](#),^[1] which at certain doses has a [hallucinogenic](#) effect and can cause [memory loss](#). The *bokor* who recovered him then, as stated, reportedly forced him, alongside others, to work on a [sugar plantation](#) until the master's death two years later. When the bokor died, and regular doses of the hallucinogen ceased, he eventually regained sanity and returned to his family after another 16 years.^[1] Narcisse was immediately recognized by the villagers and his family. When he told them the story of how he was dug up from his grave and enslaved, the villagers were surprised, but they accepted his story because they believed his experience resulted from the power of voodoo magic. He was seen as the man who was once a zombie.^[1] It has been further argued that Narcisse had broken one of the traditional behavioral codes by abandoning his children^[1] and was made into a "zombie" as a punishment. When questioned, Narcisse told investigators that the sorcerer involved had "taken his soul".^[1] The instigator of the poisoning was alleged to be Clairvius's brother, with whom Clairvius had quarreled over land and inheritance. He only returned home once he heard of his brother's death.^{[1][1]}

This case puzzled many doctors because Narcisse's death was documented and verified by the testimonies of two American doctors. The case of Narcisse was argued to be the first verifiable example of the transformation of an individual into a zombie.^[1] Narcisse's story intrigued Haitian psychiatrist Lamarque Douyon. Though dismissing supernatural explanations, Douyon believed there was some degree of truth to tales of zombies and he had been studying such accounts for decades. Suspecting zombies were somehow drugged and then revived, Douyon reached out to colleagues in America. Davis traveled to Haiti, where he obtained samples of powders purportedly used to create zombies.^[1]

Hypothesis and research

Based on the presumption that tetrodotoxin and related toxins are not always fatal, but at near-lethal doses can leave a person in a state of near-death for several days with the person remaining conscious, tetrodotoxin has been alleged to turn human beings into zombies, and has been suggested as an ingredient in [Haitian Vodou](#) preparations. This idea appeared in print as early as the 1938 non-fiction book *Tell My Horse* by [Zora Neale Hurston](#), which reported multiple accounts of purported tetrodotoxin poisoning in Haiti, by a Bokor (voodoo sorcerer).^[1] The concept was subsequently popularized in the 1980s by ethnobotanist [Wade Davis](#).^[2] However, subsequent research has discredited the tetrodotoxin-zombie hypothesis by using [analytical chemistry](#)-based tests of multiple preparations, and review of earlier reports (see below).^{[3][1][1]} After various anthropological investigations of "zombie" stories in various cultures—including Narcisse and a handful of others—reports appeared that Narcisse received a dose of a chemical mixture containing [tetrodotoxin](#) (a [pufferfish](#) toxin) and [bufotoxin](#) (a toad toxin) to induce a [coma](#) that mimicked the appearance of death. He was then allowed to return to his home where he collapsed, "died", and was buried. The Canadian [ethnobotanist Wade Davis](#), who did research related to the implication that tetrodotoxin was present,^{[1][1][1]} hypothesized how this might have been done. The *bokor* (sorcerer) would have given Narcisse a powder containing the tetrodotoxin through abraded skin. Narcisse would then have fallen into a comatose state, closely resembling death, which resulted in his live burial.^[1] His body would then have been recovered and he would have been given doses of [Datura stramonium](#) to create a compliant zombie-like state, and set to work on a plantation. After two years, the plantation owner died and Narcisse would have simply walked away to freedom.

Skepticism

While in these popular accounts, and in Haiti, tetrodotoxin is thought to have been used in [voodoo](#) preparations, in so-called [zombie](#) poisons, subsequent careful analysis has repeatedly called these accounts and early analytical studies into question on technical grounds; moreover, they have failed to identify the toxin in any such preparation,^{[3][1][1]} such that discussion of the matter of tetrodotoxin use in this way has all but disappeared from the primary literature since the early 1990s. Kao and Yasumoto concluded in the first of their papers in 1986 (and remained unswerving on the matter in their later work) that "the widely circulated claim in the lay press to the effect that tetrodotoxin is ... causal agent" in a "zombification process" is, in their view, "without factual foundation."^{[1]: 748}

Kao, of the [State University of New York](#), on interview on the matter in 1988, stated, "I actually feel this is an issue of fraud in science". A supporter of Wade, Bo Holmstedt of the [Karolinska Institute](#), more restrained, stated that it was "not deliberated fraud," rather that it was "withholding negative data" and therefore "simply bad science."^{[1][1]} Davis responded formally to the charges, arguing the variability of the preparations (as cause for Kao's inability to find the toxin in any) and possible ineptitude in dissolving the toxin by the otherwise admittedly expert Kao, and speculating on the presence of "other ingredients" in the preparations to "enable transport across the [blood–brain barrier](#)" thus providing the needed "reduction of three orders of magnitude" of the amount needed to result in the claimed effects, and arguing that "only when the bokor ... causes others to believe the victim is dead and then revived" do his efforts become apparent, and that only a single "success ... would be sufficient to support the cultural belief in the ... phenomenon."^{[1][1]} As of 1990, his critics were unpersuaded,^[1] and no literature to support the original contentions has yet appeared as of 2015, although lively popular description, especially on the web, continues.^{[3][1][1]}

From <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clairvius_Narcisse>

Voodoo Dolls

April 29, 2023 8:04 PM

Voodoo doll



A humanoid figurine with pins stuck into it: this was one method by which [cunning folk](#) battled witches using magical means. Artifact at the [Museum of Witchcraft and Magic](#) in [Cornwall](#), England. The term **Voodoo doll** commonly describes an [effigy](#) into which pins are inserted.^[1] Such practices are found in various forms in the [magical](#) traditions of many cultures around the world.^[1] Despite its name, the dolls are not prominent in [Haitian Vodou](#) and not used in [Louisiana Voodoo](#).^{[1][2]} The practise has been denounced and declared irrelevant to [Voodoo](#) religion by those in High Priesthood of [Louisiana Voodoo](#).^[1]

Depictions in Culture

20th-century link with Voodoo



Contemporary voodoo doll, with 58 pins

The link between this magical practice and Voodoo was established through the presentation of the latter in Western popular culture, enduring the first half of the 20th century.^[1] In this, the myth of this magical practice being closely linked to Voodoo and Vodou was promoted as part of the wider negative depictions of blacks and Afro-Caribbean religious practices in the United States.^[1] In John Houston Craige's 1933 book *Black Bagdad: The Arabian Nights Adventures of a Marine Captain in Haiti*, he described a Haitian prisoner sticking pins into an effigy to induce illness.^[1] Its use also appeared in film representations of Haitian Vodou such as [Victor Halperin's](#) 1932 *White Zombie* and [Jacques Tourneur's](#) 1943 *I Walked with a Zombie*.^[1] Voodoo dolls are also featured in one episode of *The Woody Woodpecker Show* (1961),^[1] as well as in the British musical *Lisztomania* (1975) and the films *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) and *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987).

By the early 21st century, the image of the voodoo doll had become particularly pervasive.^[1] It had become a novelty item available for purchase, with examples being provided in [vending machines](#) in British shopping centres,^[1] and an article on "How to Make a Voodoo Doll" being included on [WikiHow](#).^{[1][11]} Voodoo dolls were also featured in the 2009 animated [Disney](#) movie *The Princess and the Frog*.^[1]

In 2020, [Louisiana Voodoo](#) High Priest Robi Gilmore stated, "It blows my mind that people still believe [Voodoo dolls are relevant to Voodoo religion]. Hollywood really did us a number. We do not stab pins in dolls to hurt people; we don't take your hair and make a doll, and worship the devil with it, and ask the devil to give us [black magic](#) to get our revenge on you. It is not done, it won't be done, and it never will exist for us."¹

From <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voodoo_doll>

Gris-Gris

April 29, 2023 8:07 PM

Gris Gris New Orleans and meaning What is the meaning of Gris-Gris in Voodoo



In [Vodoun](#), or Voodoo, **gris-gris** resemble [charms](#) or [talismans](#) which are kept for good luck or to ward off evil.

Originally gris-gris were probably dolls or images of the gods. But presently most gris-gris are small cloth bags containing herbs, oils, stones, small bones, hair and nails, pieces of cloth soaked with perspiration and/or other personal items gathered under the directions of a god for the protection of the owner.

The origin of the word gris-gris is unclear. But some scholars trace it to *juju* the West African name for [fetish](#), or sacred object. Juju maybe be an European translation for the expression *grou-grou* (hence gris-gris). Or it may refer to the French word *joujou*, which meant «doll» or «plaything».

Most of the African fetishes were shaped like dolls, and early Europeans on the African West Coast may have mistaken serious religious objects for innocent looking poppets.

Walter Gibson, in *Witchcraft* (1973), states that *fetish* denotes any object possessed by a holy spirit, while *juju* more specifically meant a charm, something witch doctors needed to make their medicine work either for good or ill.

Biren Bonnerjea whose *Dictionary of Superstitions and Mythology* appeared in 1927 defines *juju* as the West African name for a fetish, also called *grigri*.

The gris-gris became traditional in New Orleans, the American headquarters for voodoo, where they were use for various things such as attracting money and love, stopping gossip, protecting the home, maintaining good health and achieving innumerable other ends.

At one time, every police officer was known to carry a gris-gris for protection in new orleans.

A gris-gris is ritually made at an altar containing the four [elements](#) of earth (salt), air (incense), water and fire (a candle flame). The number of ingredients (placed in the gris-gris) is always one, three, five, seven, nine or thirteen.

Ingredients are never an even number or more than thirteen. Stones and colored objects are chosen for their occult and astrological meanings corresponding to the purpose for which the gris-gris is to be used. Legends concerning the famous New Orleans Voodoo Queen [Marie Laveau](#) claim her gris-gris contained bits of bone, colored stones, graveyard dust (also called *goofer dust*), salt, and red pepper. Other more elaborate gris-gris were made of bird nests and horse hair weavings.

A red-flannel bag holding a lodestone or magnet was a gambler's favorite gris-gris, which was suppose to absolutely guarantee good luck. Another favorite gris-gris of gamblers was made of chamois, a piece of red flannel, a shark's tooth, pine-tree sap, and dove's blood.

The dove's blood and sap were mixed together, and this mixture was used to write the amount that the gambler wished to win on the chamois, which was wrapped in the red flannel with the shark's tooth between the two layers, all of which was sewn together with cat's hair.

This charm was supposedly worn in the left shoe to bring good and often uncomfortable luck.

What was referred to as «putting a gris-gris» on a person could be used to bring others bad luck or misfortune. Such gris-gris filled with gunpowder or red pepper were thrown on a person or at his door supposedly to get him into a fight.

Gris gris also were to get rid of people. Marie Laveau to have written a person's name on a small balloon, then tied it to a statue of Saint Expedite, when released the person would supposedly depart in the same direction as the released balloon took.

Leaving a gris-gris, usually containing powder, for a person generally that he or she was not in the «voodooos» favor and they had better watch their step.

One of Marie Laveau's more horrible 'wargas', or bad luck reputedly was a bag made from a shroud of a person that had been dead for nine days.

Gris-gris contained the following ingredients a dried one-eyed toad, the little finger of a black person who had committed suicide, a dried lizard, a bat's wings, a cat's eyes, an owl's liver, and a rooster's heart.

If such a gris-gris were hidden in the victim's handbag or under his pillow, surely the unfortunate would die. Many white masters mistreated their slaves and often found gris-gris filled with black pepper containing saffron, salt, gunpowder, and pulverized dog manure.

In [Santeria](#), gris-gris bags are called *resguardos* or «protectors.» A typical resguardos under the protection of the thunder god Chango usually contains herbs, spices, brown sugar, aloes, stones or other sacred relics, tied up in red velvet and stitched with red thread.

Finally the Santerio attaches a gold sword, the symbol of Saint Barbara (Chango's image of a Catholic saint). And if the sword breaks Chango has interceded on behalf of the owner.

Gurunfindas are talismans made by the Santeria's black witches, *mayomberos*, to ward off evil from themselves and direct it toward others.

To make a *gurunfindas* the mayombero first hallows out a *guiro*. It is a hard, inedible plant found in the tropics. Then fills it with the heads and hearts of a turtle and various specious species of parrots, the tongue and eyes of a rooster, and seven live ants.

Next the mayombero adds seven teeth, the jawbone and some hair of a cadaver, along with the cadaver's name written on a piece of paper, and seven coins to pay the dead spirit for his services.

Then the mayombero pours rum over the mixture and buries it beneath the sacred ceiba tree for 21 days.

When he disinters the *guiro* the mayombero marks the outside of the fruit with chalk. And then hangs the charm near his home. A.G.H.

From <<https://www.themystica.com/gris-gris/>>