

## **“New Age Witchcraft: WitchTok and White Washing**

By Marteena

Witchcraft has been embedded in many cultures around the world, including countries in Europe, The Americas, Africa, and South Asia. Harvesting and healing is at the root of these practices. Early works in astrology, originally written in Sanskrit and dating as far back as 400 B.C., make observations of the powers of crystal magic. According to New Age practitioners, “crystals, in their modern-day usage, can be used as a teacher or source of spiritual guidance by anyone.” (Carlos 1). In western society today, women –especially minorities– have been able to use magic to feel divine and achieve success.

All over the world, many individuals are beginning to open up their minds to different ways that spirituality manifests itself. Whether it be old folk magic, tarot, or crystals, witchcraft has been commercialized and accepted as a type of spiritual lifestyle. But this also prompts the conversation of who exactly can partake in these practices. Hoodoo and Voodoo particularly originated from african American slaves. Santeria comes from Cuban-African origin. Crystals and yoga comes from India, and folk practice comes from, all around Europe. In any case, some traditional practices such as crystal-work and ancestor magic are arguably to be kept within the ethnic group that initiated the practice. New age witchcraft and commercialization of certain practices are in danger of becoming a mass culturally appropriated spiritualist product. So, how do we navigate the world of New age witchcraft while also being mindful of ethnic practices? It would be easy to say that if an individual is not African American they should not practice Hoodoo, or if one is not Cuban don’t practice Santeria, but in most cases, people do not even understand where this magic originated. They simply scroll on Tik Tok and learn through posts online and attempt to imitate spells.

The most important idea is that if an individual decides to practice magic, they should learn the history and foundational ideologies to participate in the cultural exchange of witchcraft. Additionally, it’s a way for women to join together and understand themselves, and each other. As seen in early 2017, American witches participated in the mass spell against former president Donald Trump. These witches

used hashtags on social media to join witches all over the country to strengthen their spell. Nevertheless, witchcraft and spirituality goes deeper than political hexing, it's about connecting with the universe or ancestors to gain insight on how to succeed in life. Madame Omi Kongo, a Hoodoo rootworker from a long line of female practitioners who runs a Tumblr blog, says, "Without an African ancestral link, the practice becomes something other than Hoodoo." For her, Hoodoo means "making something out of nothing." She uses the magical practice for herself and her clients as a way to overcome obstacles and attempt to gain a desired outcome with the help of spirits. One can only truly appreciate these cultural practices when they learn the history and importance behind it. While some may find witchcraft as an interest or hobby, others believe that this is a birthright that should be recognized.

Witchcraft and magic is about experiencing life in a new way— to see life with a different set of eyes. However, at the same time, many spells and traditions are linked to generational suffering and should not be shared with others outside the heritage. This has led to eclectic —mostly white— witches becoming angry, as they are interested in trying new spells and rituals with a particular witch practice. Even more so, these same witches are the people who fail to represent or even display Black, Asian, or Hispanic imagery on their typical "witchy" blog or Instagram posts. The witchcraft exchange argument has become the heat of discussion in the witch community and has been subjugated to the name of “gatekeeping” or trying to keep people out of certain witch communities. The argument basically comes down to this: Should a White person be practicing a ritual that is rooted in slave practice? My answer, as a black woman who has come from a line of women who've practiced witchcraft is no. When a white person practices hoodoo or voodoo, it becomes something else entirely. It can not possibly be practiced with the same intentions as a slave who has experienced suffering at the hands of white people. “If you don't know about where the customs you practice come from, figure that out because otherwise it becomes another form of colonization and theft,” said Edgar Fabián Frías, a Latinx artist with Wixáritari Indigenous Mexican heritage who identifies with the non-binary bruj(x) moniker (Joho & Sung). In either case, close practices and gatekeeping is at the core of the argument in the commercialization of witchcraft.

Since Western culture has seen a recent surge in witchcraft, tarot cards and crystals have become a particular interest for beginner witches. Initially starting in Italy, tarot has been used for centuries as a tool for divination and oracle reading. But the new introduction of this practice has been seen as a way to invigorate minority communities such as the LGBT+ community and people of color. Lisa Sterle, freelance artist and creator of the “modern witch” tarot deck stated her tarot is, “ an inclusive feminist deck.” she exchanges the predominately white characters in the tarot cards of the 1909 Rider-Waite-Smith deck to women, people of color, plus-sized women, and queer characters. In addition to Tarot, working with the cycles of the moon and seasons; and using a daily meditation practice alongside energy healing crystals are used to empower the everyday modern woman. Crystals have been used in healing since the times of the ancient sumerian civilization, and have since then evolved into British, Indian, and Native American cultures alike (Carlos 6). Unlike Middle Eastern and North African women who seek marriage with spells and witchcraft, these western practices aim to encourage women to center themselves and become independent from the patriarchy. In Orlando, Florida, the store “Avalon” contains self-help books, classes on how to read Tarot, and collect cultural talismans inspired by peoples around the world. At the center of it all, is the crystal collection. Avalon is the perfect example of the good that New Age spirituality is trying to bring to the world. It promotes peace within religions, good diet, good mental health, and plenty of other things that attract a young clientele – or a clientele looking for deeper meaning in their daily lives (Carlos 25). But even though these practices are becoming mainstream in western media, it can not be forgotten that women and people of color are at the forefront of this practice and should be recognized for their contributions. Women of all backgrounds are free to use tarot and divination to fight the patriarchy, but the main priority is to give credit to the women that were persecuted to make this practice possible.

Whether one was born into a line of witch practitioners, or became interested through TikTok, witchcraft has become a quintessential aspect of the female experience. The traditional uses of magick have been to help women tap into their divinity and climb the social ladder, even in modern day it has become a way for women of all shapes, colors, and sizes to connect to their spirituality. Female power can

be invoked in many ways. Using tarot, crystals, and other magical methods is just one way that women can evolve and gain confidence. Whether exploring or experienced, witchcraft is open for everyone-- as long as it is respected.

#### Works cited

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