



# Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America (Religion in America)

*Theophus H. Smith*

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**Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America (Religion in America)** Theophus H. Smith  
This book provides a sophisticated new interdisciplinary interpretation of the formulation and evolution of African American religion and culture. Theophus Smith argues for the central importance of "conjure"--a magical means of transforming reality--in black spirituality and culture. Smith shows that the Bible, the sacred text of Western civilization, has in fact functioned as a magical formulary for African Americans. Going back to slave religion, and continuing in black folk practice and literature to the present day, the Bible has provided African Americans with ritual prescriptions for prophetically re-envisioning, and thereby transforming, their history and culture. In effect the Bible is a "conjure book" for prescribing cures and curses, and for invoking extraordinary and Divine powers to effect changes in the conditions of human existence--and to bring about justice and freedom. Biblical themes, symbols, and figures like Moses, the Exodus, the Promised Land, and the Suffering Servant, as deployed by African Americans, have crucially formed and reformed not only black culture, but American society as a whole. Smith examines not only the religious and political uses of conjure, but its influence on black aesthetics, in music, drama, folklore, and literature. The concept of conjure, he shows, is at the heart of an indigenous and still vital spirituality, with exciting implications for reformulating the next generation of black studies and black theology. Even more broadly, Smith proposes, "conjuring culture" can function as a new paradigm for understanding Western religious and cultural phenomena generally.

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