

Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition

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A remarkable moment occurs in the climax of the 1992 film Daughters of the Dust. The setting is a sheltered key, hidden within a cluster of is- lands off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina. The time is a few years past the turn of the twentieth century. The scene opens on a golden afternoon. A family is gathering to say good-bye, for on this day some

of them will travel North, to better jobs, new schools, greater oppor- tunities. Those who depart will leave behind a community they have been a part of for generations. They will also leave behind the elderly matriarch of their clan, Nana Peazant. Nana beckons her children to join in a communion ceremony, for she wants to give them "a part of

herself' to take with them. She clutches a leather pouch that is tightly wound with string and attached to a Bible. It contains personal keep- sakes, such as a twist of her mother's hair and her own, some dried flowers, and various roots and herbs. Nana calls it a hand. Like herself, it embodies the spirits of the "Old Souls," those enslaved Africans who

touched down more than a century earlier on the backwater jetty known as Ibo landing.

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