



# **The Spiritual Churches of New Orleans: Origins, Beliefs, and Rituals of an African-American Religion**

*Claude F. Jacobs, Andrew J. Kaslow*

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The New Orleans Spiritual churches constitute a distinctive African-American belief system. Influenced by Catholicism, Pentecostalism, Spiritualism, and Voodoo, the group is a New World syncretic faith, similar to Espiritismo, Santería, and Umbanda. The Spiritual Churches of New Orleans combines a historical account of the emergence of this religion with careful ethnographic description of current congregations. At the same time, text and photographs eloquently convey the ecstasy at the heart of the Spiritual experience.

The Spiritual churches began in the 1920s as a women's movement. Men later assumed leadership in an effort to legitimate the group within the New Orleans religious community and form associations with Spiritual churches elsewhere in the United States.

Unlike earlier researchers, who treated practices in the churches as expressions of black folk traditions, the authors see Spiritual ritual not as based on magic, but as the way the sacred is acted out within an African-American aesthetic. During worship, members may be filled by the Holy Spirit, as in Pentecostal churches, or "entertain" spirits or spirit guides, as in Spiritualism or Voodoo. Prophecy and healing are presented as the markers of this faith, and the Native American figure Black Hawk as a major symbol of empowerment.

Based on extensive interviews with church members, years of participant observation, and careful research in documentary sources, this book achieves rigorous conceptual clarity in a straightforward, engaging style.

The Authors: Claude F. Jacobs holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from Tulane University. He teaches at Oakland University.

Andrew J. Kaslow holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from Columbia University. He is a consultant to international organizations.

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