

VOODOO PRACTITIONERS SCATTER AFTER KATRINA

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NEW ORLEANS

Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: To me and many other Christians, this article just adds to the possibility that Katrina was not "just a coincidence."

Deut 18:9 "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. 10 "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 "or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12 "For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. (NKJ)

The last time Don Glossop saw his customers they were ritually burning green candles, hoping voodoo would pierce the federal bureaucracy and hasten the arrival of desperately needed relief checks.

Glossop's shop, New Orleans Mystic, has been closed since Hurricane Katrina swamped the city two months ago, and most of his clients, who practice a local variant of voodoo, have scattered across the country.

He fears that Katrina, which laid waste to entire neighborhoods and claimed hundreds of lives here, may take another casualty: New Orleans' status as the country's voodoo capital.

"As of today I would say it's pretty dead," Glossop said. "Even the tourist shops are in jeopardy. There is a chance for a huge loss here."

Voodoo has long been entrenched in New Orleans, quietly practiced in homes with altars, candles and incense to solve problems of the heart and

wallet. Before the storm tore through, about 15 percent of the city's population actively practiced, according to Lisa Fannon, a tour guide, though estimates vary widely.

Voodoo is part of the vernacular here, showing up in jazz and conversation. Some residents still sprinkle red brick dust on their doorway steps to ward off evil spirits.

It's an economic draw as well, enticing curious tourists and their pocketbooks into stores such as Glossop's.

While plans are still on for an annual voodoo fest for Monday, organizer Brandi Kelley said the event will be much smaller this year because many drummers and dancers were forced to relocate.

The ceremony at her shop will focus mainly on healing the city.

"We have got to call on the ancestors for help and get real serious about it," Kelley said. "The spirit is in the city. It's the spirit of this city that is going to rise from the ashes."

If only she could find her snake for the closing ceremony. He was supposed to be in a bathtub of a friend's apartment.

"They say he's somewhere in this room full of debris," Kelley said, her voice trailing off.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The "go away" hurricane ritual was performed in July, just as it always is at the start of the hurricane season.

"It didn't quite work out so well," acknowledged Giselle Moller, manager of Marie Laveau House of Voodoo. But, she said, it may have helped a bit.

"Imagine if the hurricane would have hit us straight on. There would have been no French Quarter," she said.

Even before Katrina, some thought voodoo was fading in New Orleans because the younger generation was less interested in the complicated practice, which involves substantial memorization of rituals and songs, Glossop said.

But New Orleans is not giving up on voodoo, notwithstanding evangelist Franklin Graham's recent comments that the city's Mardi Gras revelry and ties to voodoo were adverse to Christian beliefs.

Defenders say voodoo is a legitimate African-based religion that has been

unfairly maligned in movies and popular culture.

"Voodoo is not some kind of black magic cult," said Wade Davis, a Washington-based National Geographic explorer-in-residence who has studied the religion extensively in Haiti. "It's the distillation of very profound religious ideas that came over during the tragic era of slavery."

In New Orleans, much of what is practiced these days is a system of folk magic. Some also practice Haitian voodoo.

As the city revives, proponents hope voodoo will make a comeback, too, because it's part of the intrigue that draws visitors.

"I think it's going to be a very strong part of what will get people back here," said Jameson King, who works in one of the voodoo shops in the French Quarter. "We're here for more than drinking."

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