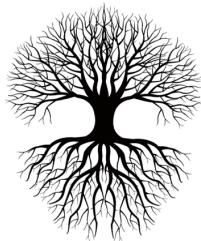


Jasmine Wigginton

Jasmine Wigginton is a youth worker and sometimes a poet. Through her work, she explores intergenerational trauma and attempts to recreate stories from her ancestors. She centers her life as a Black woman from Kentucky and recognizes the inherent magic in her lineage. Through her writing, she transcends the emptiness of her ancestral stories from the archives and restores stories through poetry and re imaginings of the past, present, and future. Through publishing her work in Root Work Journal she hopes to join other Black thinkers in building a ship that is based on the memories and resilience of our ancestors outside of the limits of Western ways of knowing.



Hoodoo, Kentucky, Workers Administration Project, Poetry, Black Folklore, Ancestors and Memory

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The poem “ ‘Hoodoo’ Inspired by Mamie Hansberry from Christian Country Kentucky” is based on the voice of Mamie Hansberry, a formerly enslaved woman from Kentucky. Hansberry’s words were recorded by historians and archivists who worked for the Workers Project Administration (WPA). The WPA was a Depression-era program where historians and writers went around the South to collect the stories of the former enslaved. This program provided an opportunity for Black voices to be added and centralized in the archives. Despite positive intentions, the archivists were clouded by their own internal bias. Most of the collectors were white Southern males who held strong biases that influenced the topics they chose to explore. For example, Black folklore is featured heavily in the WPA narratives. To the recorder, these beliefs might have been viewed as eccentric and uncivilized. When interacting with Mamie Hansberry, they more than likely prompted her into explaining “Hoodism”. Instead of a simple introduction, however, Hansberry spun an oral rhyming poem, “A snake head an’ er lizard tail, Hoo-doo; Not close den a mile of jail, Hoo-doo.” Through her rhythmic re-telling, she showcases the beauty and power that resides in “Hoodisms”, that was probably lost by the white male listeners.

The archives often offer us silence on Black voices that are women, poor, and rural. If they were recorded, they are often tainted by the bias of our racist and sexist systems, such as in the WPA narratives. Instead of looking to the archives to better tell the stories of my ancestors, I choose to do so through poetry allowing me to reimagine and explore where the archives offer me no assistance. Removing the white male gaze, I give my version of “Hoodism” based on the long line of Kentucky Black women who came before me, like Mamie Hansberry. This is my homage to their voices and stories. Their stories are not lost or forgotten.

When you cannot escape the stranglehold of the past - Hoodoo;

When a veiled black empty faced figure rummages in your dreams, taking away your mother, and you awake to her walking across your wall - Hoodoo;

When your stomach tingles, your ears burn, and your eyes close – someone is thinking of you - Hoodoo;

The taste of cornbread - fried on a skillet - unable to afford milk - so you add water to make it float - to make it sizzle - and it enters your mouth - crumbling - tasting like happiness instead of poverty - Hoodoo;

You avoid the cracks in the sidewalk leaping over them to avoid breakage of your mother’s back - Hoodoo;

The endless look in someone's eyes, the burning of their touch - you feel safe and whole - infinite maybe - but they run away because they are not ready to be whole /we do not know how to be whole - Hoodoo;

When the cat your mother dropped off two years on the side of the road because, "she kept on having babies" returns on your porch licking her paws and staring into your soul with her yellow eyes mocking you -Hoodoo;

You only pick up a penny turned on its head - Hoodoo;

Your first memory sitting next to your mother with your legs swinging on the kitchen counter- a small blue house - Hoodoo;

Turning your long, wild, and curly mane- because it needed to be "tamed" -into straight hair that blows in the wind but over time thins out because the carcinogenic chemicals in your "creamy crack" do not want you to glow - Hoodoo;

When your eyes are the same as her eyes and you look at the picture and recognize your connection. She is not lost or forgotten - Hoodoo;

Your grandmother telling you to wear socks on the uncarpeted ground, "you will catch a cold" - Hoodoo;

The ghosts of the past haunt you / you were born into this/ the pain/ the heartache/ and most importantly the anger/ you came out ready to fight to prove to the world you deserved to be here/ your tongue lashes out at the first person who attempts to avoid the fighter but you show them that they cannot - Hoodoo;