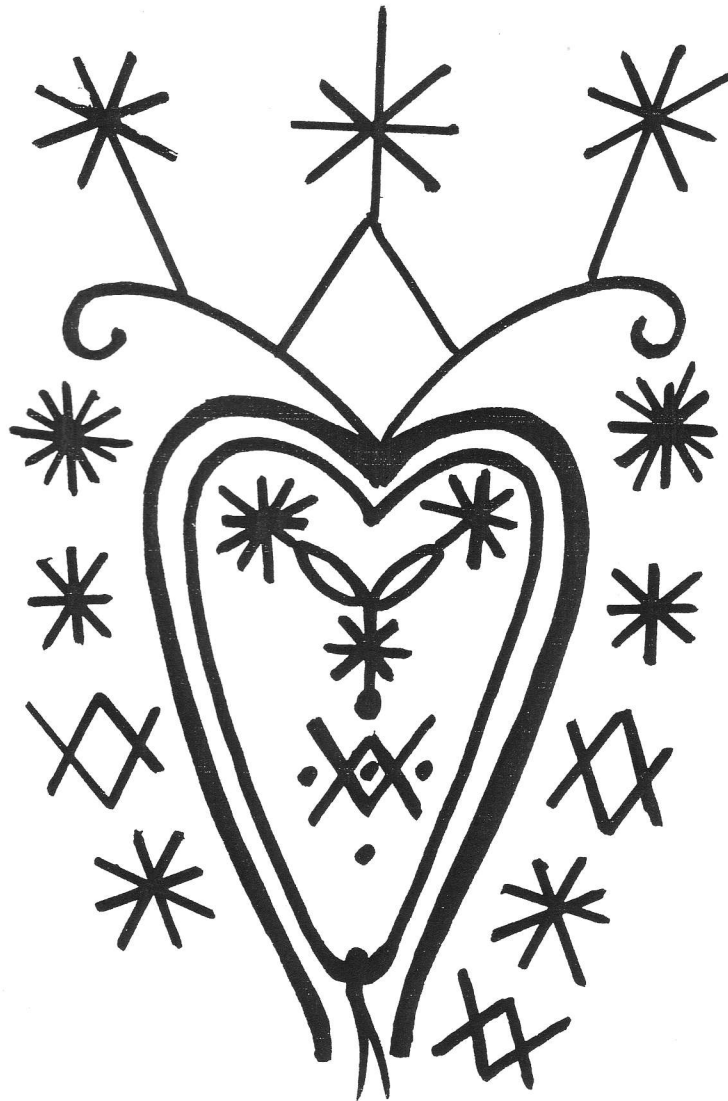


# Voodoo In America: The Saga of a High Priestess

Gro Mambo  
Angéla Noványón Idizol



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## **Acknowledgment**

A very special "THANK YOU" to my Godfather  
**Gro Hungan Hilaire Michel Noványón Idizol, Mariana, Haiti**  
for having enough faith in me,  
to initiate me,  
teach me,  
and for setting my feet correctly on this path of the  
Voodoo Religion.

I would like to give a special acknowledgement to all the godchildren of LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary and to those who have worked diligently following me as Mambos and Hungans to make a difference in the Voodoo religion.

### **Mambos & Hungans**

Gro Hungan Yatande Noványón Idizol  
Gro Hungan AqweMinfor Noványón Idizol  
Gro Mambo Satela Noványón Idizol  
Gro Hungan Yabofe Noványón Idizol

### **Loa Attendants**

Iya Viel/Octavia Danielson  
Hunsi Le'Dmiel/Charisse Ball  
Hunsi Fleurifwi Richberg/Debra Richberg-Warren

### **Choir Master**

Fleurfé LeGrande

### **Drummers**

Papa Robert Kenyetta — Master Drummer  
Hunsi Kanzo Dantambu Obeng/Ahmed Lewis, Sr. — Master Drummer  
Gro Hungan AqweMinfor Noványón Idizol — Master Drummer  
Hungan Jenkanpe Josess/Jeffrey Weaver  
Hunsi Ayenta/Akin B. Ware

## OVERVIEW

Visionaire. Motivator. Spiritual Guide. For over 20 years Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon, Idizol has pioneered the path to accurate representation of the Haitian Voodoo religion and African-based faiths in the media and mainstream society. She has been at the forefront of a growing cross-cultural exchange of spiritual empowerment and holistic healing. Since the early 1970's Gro Mambo has successfully combined impeccable credentials as a practicing High Priestess, Ethno-botanist, Psychic, Spiritual Vessel for Loa Channeling and gifted Author.

Her manifestations of the Loa/Orisa (Divine Spiritual Guides), shown pictorially in this book, have aired on the A&E Channel, Discovery Channel, Unsolved Mysteries, National Geographic and in a plethora of print publications. Gro Mambo also serves as an expert witness, in cases involving African-based religions, for The Philadelphia Court System. Likewise, as a practicing/initiated expert of African-based religions and, specifically Haitian Voodoo, she is an inspirational speaker; eminent University Lecturer, as well as a Television Script and Broadcast Consultant specializing in related topics.

As a Priestess ordained by sacred rite to serve as a vessel of God, Christ and the Holy Loa, the physical embodiment, during spiritual manifestations, morphs into the energized verve of the possession. From these occasions of spiritual transformation, understanding of integration of mind, body, and core-spirit is explored and revealed in the published volumes *Divine Messages of the Loa I & II*, *Keeping It Real* and *The African Way*.

Her visionary insight and proactive promotion of African-based religion has drastically influenced societal perception of these sacred systems in traditional and non-traditional circles. Most importantly, Gro Mambo has helped bring the enormous benefits of holistic medicine and spirituality to those that need it most – the general public.

She created a paradigm for exploring the healing process - a model that incorporates aura cleansing, core-spiritual exploration, and a re-alignment of mind, body and spirit. She noted, "Doctors are taught to prescribe pills for people who often are out of spiritual alignment, their aura is dull and spirits ailing, which reveals itself in physical disease, aches and/or pains. But, true healing peels past these surfaces and delves into the core-realm of spiritual health for the most effective natural way of restoring total-body wellness and balance."

Rather than turn her back on the Voodoo Priest training in an embrace of conventional mainstream pursuits, Gro Mambo Angela extended her practice to bring together the best Priests and Priestesses trained in the Ancient Healing Sciences. In 1999, she introduced the National African Religion Congress (NARC World) to the United States, and within a year she established NARC Classes/Workshops for Continuing Education in the Healing Sciences. Always a visionary, she continued to establish an International Directory of Priests and Priestesses that today boasts over 5,000 listings of spiritual houses. She is also the founding Priestess of LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary, the first 501(c)(3) non-profit recognized church of Haitian Voodoo in America.

Since beginning her spiritual journey over 22 years ago, Gro Mambo has emerged as one of the world's leading proponents of the Ancient Healing Sciences and the African-based religions that continue to preserve these sacred traditions.

**This booklet is divided into several segments which deal with different aspect of the religion. We shall explain just what each segment contains for ease of understanding.**

**Vitae'**: The studies and work of Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol

## **MILESTONES**

### **Achievements of Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol**

As you turn the pages of the Milestones of Gro Mambo, you will see many photographs where she is in spiritual possession.

**Exploring the Divine Retreat of the Loas**, photo shows a spiritual manifestation/ possession of the Loa Mali Louise, dressed in blue denim, preparing a earth-based holistic cleansing bath.

**Amor Enchante of Erusile Freeda and Papa Dumbala**, photo of the embodiment of divine love, revered in Haitian Voodoo as the Loa Erusile Freeda, during spiritual channeling.

**Of Land & Sea: Connecting with Life's Energy Force**, photo shows **Papa Aqwe and Erusile Dantour** during a ceremony in Haiti honoring innate-divine direction, intuition and clear perception. The verve manifestation shown at the oceanic water... the source of life. It is said that to water all things living must come. These photos reveal the pure synergized force that is connected in Ancient Healing Sciences to the Loa Erusile Dantour.

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## VITAE' GRO MAMBO ANGÉLÁ NOVÁNYÓN, IDIZOL

Mambo Angéla Noványón, Idizol, the founder of Le Peristyle Haitian Sanctuary, as well as the National African Religion Congress (NARC World), went to Haiti in 1977 to study the Voodoo Religion. She went into Haiti with an introductory letter to an established priestess of the native religion. After some difficulties, Mambo Angéla Noványón was able to establish a relationship with a priestess from whom she began to learn about Haitian Voodoo. She finally formalized a relationship with Papa Hiliare Michele Noványón, Idizol, a high priest (Hungan) and founder of Le Peristyle Sanctuary, in Haiti. Following years of study, she was initiated as a priestess (Mambo). Her mission was to bring back to the United States every component of the true African religion as it evolved from former slaves of the Congo, Dahomey, Togo and native Indians of the island of Haiti. During the 10 years of work, Mambo Angéla Noványón continued to study and advance in the religion. In 1984, her name was changed to Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón, Idizol, when she achieved the status of high priestess.

### PERSONAL MILESTONES

- |                |   |                   |
|----------------|---|-------------------|
| <b>1971</b>    | Nana Parabia (Priestess of the Akan religion of Ghana):<br>Studied African religious songs and dance.   |                   |
| <b>1971-72</b> | Arthur Hall Dance Ensemble<br>Certifications as Master Dance Instructor<br>Concentration on sacred and secular African dance forms  |                   |
| <b>1972-73</b> | Tour conductor and lecturer, Ile-Ife Museum   | Philadelphia, PA  |
| <b>1973-77</b> | Founded and Directed - Spirit Cultural Dance Ensemble   | Philadelphia, PA. |
| <b>1974</b>    | Recipient – J. J. Desslaine Award   |                   |
| <b>1976</b>    | Director of African Dance Dept at Lacher Latari School  | Philadelphia, PA. |
| <b>1977-78</b> | Introduction to Haitian Voodoo under Papa Hilaire Michel<br>Began study to become a priestess of the Voodoo Religion of Haiti under the direction of Papa Hilaire Michele, a high priest of Haitian Voodoo in Mariani, Haiti.<br>Learned the indigenous practices of the people of Haiti: religion, herbal medicines, song, dance and drum. | Mariani, Haiti    |

<b>1978-83</b>	Haitian Voodoo under Mambo Josephine (a priestess) Studied dance under Mambo Josephine. Learned the drums and songs of the Loa Dumbala, Erusile Dantour and Erusile Freeda	Delmas, Haiti
<b>1978-83</b>	Haitian Voodoo Studies under Hungan Rejee Studied under Hungan Rejee, a master in dance and songs of the Loa Erusile Freeda (Oshun).	Kenscoff, Haiti
	Haitian Voodoo Studies under Hungan Marcell Studied Haitian art and vevés (the art and symbolism of the Voodoo religion.)	Mais Jace, Haiti
	Haitian Voodoo Studies under Hungan Daniel Studied Yanvalou (complex ritual dance)	Saint Louis, Haiti
	Haitian Voodoo Studies under Hungan Lieonells Studied advanced Ethno botany (herbal medicine) Also, learned the rituals, dance, songs and drum rhythms of the Loas: Mali Louise (Oya) and Couzin Zaka.	Carrefour, Haiti
<b>1982</b>	Appeared in <i>Ayida</i> at the Academy of Music	Philadelphia, PA.
<b>1983</b>	Founded – LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary	Philadelphia, PA.
<b>1989</b>	LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary attained 501(c)(3) status	
<b>1990</b>	Achievement Award, Level Movement Choreographer Grantee, Pennsylvania Council of the Arts  Board of Directors formed for LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary Dance Instructor at the Center for African Culture	
	1990 Authored: <i>Divine Messages of the Loas, Vol. I</i> 1991 Authored: <i>Divine Messages of the Loas, Vol. II</i> 1992 Authored: <i>The African Way</i>	Philadelphia, PA.
<b>1990-91</b>	Dance Instructor various colleges and universities	Philadelphia, PA.
<b>1991</b>	Presented dance recital <i>Agwe Suite</i> performed at German- town Friends Theatre. The play initially debuted in 1982 at the Robin Hood Dell, along with other African groups, aiding in launching the annual African-American Night.  Coordinated public Voodoo Ceremony – African American Historical & Cultural Museum, the first public Voodoo Ceremony held in the United States.	Philadelphia, PA

- 1993-Present** Marquis Who's Who in the East
- 1995-Present** Marquis Who's Who of American Women  
Marquis Who's Who in the World
- 1996** Established the first U.S.-based Ogotwa Men's Society,  
(L'Ogotwa Au d' Nomn Societi)  
a brotherhood steeped in spirituality and unity.
- 1997-2001** North American Delegate of the Orisa World Congress  
Mambo Angéla Noványón, Idizol holds chieftaincy for  
the Oyotunji African Village in Sheldon, South Carolina.
- 1998** Public Voodoo Ceremony – Congo Square New Orleans, La.  
Held the first Haitian Voodoo Ceremony, since the  
Time of Marie LaVeau.  
The city of New Orleans Proclamation by Mayor  
Marc H. Morial:  
May 9, 1999 - Mayor Marc H. Morial conferred the title  
of Honorary Citizen upon Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón,  
Idizol.  
June 6, 1998 - New Orleans Voodoo Festival Day.  
June 13<sup>th</sup> erected the first Voodoo Sanctuary in Sao Paulo, Brazil and conducted  
the first public Voodoo ceremonies.
- 1999** Founded the National African Religion Congress, the certifying board for Priests  
and Priestesses of African-based religions– February 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Philadelphia, PA  
Introduction of the first certification process of African-based religion Priests  
and Priestesses—certifying board formed.  
  
Held the First National African Religion Congress Conference and  
Unity Ceremony Philadelphia, PA  
  
Founded the National African Religion Congress,  
International chapter (NARC World) – June Sao Paulo, Brazil  
Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón, Idizol is the first to introduce  
the certification system of Priests, Priestesses, Babalawos  
and workers of African-based religions.
- 2000-Present** Editor-in-Chief and Publisher Philadelphia, PA  
The National African Religion Congress  
Directory of Priests and Priestesses – First Edition 2000, Second Edition 2001,  
Third Edition 2002-03, Fourth Edition 2004-05, Fifth Edition 2005-06,  
Six Edition 2006-07  
Governor Tom Ridge, Commonwealth of PA, Proclamation

- Senator Arlen Specter, United States Senate, Proclamation  
Held the Second National African Religion Congress Conference and  
Unity Ceremony Philadelphia, PA
- 2001** Held the Third National African Religion Congress Conference and  
Unity Ceremony Philadelphia, PA
- June: Guest Lecturer - Library of Ethnology, topic focusing on  
*Unity in the Voodoo Faith.* Port Au Prince, Haiti
- Guest Speaker - *Unification & Conflict Resolution in Haiti*,  
Radio Haiti Port Au Prince, Haiti
- Guest Speaker - *Standing for African-based Religions*,  
Haiti Television News Port Au Prince, Haiti
- Established the first U.S.-based Ogatzulis Women's Society,  
a sisterhood steeped in spirituality and unity. Philadelphia, PA.
- 2001-2002** John F. Street Mayor of Philadelphia, PA proclaims July 19th through July 22,  
2001 National African Religion Unity Week  
Tom Ridge, Governor, Proclamation  
Robert Brady, Member of Congress, Proclamation, National African Religion  
Congress/NARC World  
Chaka Fattah, Member of Congress, Proclamation, National African  
Religion Congress/NARC World  
National African Religion Congress/NARC World Certification Drive over  
1,500 Port-au-Prince, Haiti
- 2002** Held the Fourth National African Religion Congress Conference and  
Unity Ceremony Philadelphia, PA
- National African Religion Congress/NARC World certification Drive  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti
- Lecture Pace University  
Recognition for Voodoo and Haitian Culture,  
Pace University, Haitian Student Association  
New York, NY
- 2003** National African Religion Congress/NARC World Certification Drive over  
1,000 certification  
Havana, Cuba
- National African Religion Congress/NARC World Certification Drive  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti



Introduction to Continuing Education and Accreditation Program for Alternative  
Medicine for African-based Priests and Priestesses

**2003-04** Edward G. Rendell, Governor, Proclamation National African Religion  
Congress/NARC World  
John F. Street Mayor of Philadelphia, PA , Proclamation, National African  
Religion Congress/NARC World  
Chaka Fattah, Member of Congress, Proclamation, National African  
Religion Congress/NARC World

**2004-05** Held the Sixth African Religion Conference, National African Religion  
Congress/NARC World, Orange County Convention Center  
Orlando, FL

Buddy Dyer Mayor of Orlando, FL Proclamation National African Religion  
Congress Religion Conference  
Ric Keller, Member of Congress Proclamation

**Presently** Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón, Idizol lectures at:

Pace University, New York, NY  
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA  
Cabrini College, Radnor, PA  
Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA  
Rutgers University, Camden, NJ  
Arcadia, University, Glenside, PA  
Lafayette College, Easton, PA  
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón, Idizol has been called as an expert witness by the Pennsylvania judicial systems in defense of the practices of the Voodoo religion. Her work has been the subject of television documentaries, including A&E Television Network's *Ancient Mysteries* and The History Channel's *In Search of History: Voodoo*, in which LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary is described as "one of the world's centers of Voodoo." Directory listings include the *National African Religion Congress (NARC) Directory of Priests and Priestesses*, *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the East*, *Who's Who in American Women*, *Who's Who in the World*. Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón, Idizol, resides in Philadelphia, PA., where she devotes her time to offering comprehensive spiritual consultations: child guidance, employment and career guidance, marital, drug and alcohol counseling and spiritual training for High Priests and High Priestesses.

**A tribute to Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol**

**Commemoration of the 22nd Anniversary**



**Mali Louise brings the Mud Bath to the Retreat**



**Mali Louise dances with the fire**



**Mali Louise mixes the herbs for the Mud Bath**

**MILESTONES**  
**Achievements of Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón, Idizol**  
**High Priestess and Founder**  
**Le Peristyle Haitian Sanctuary**

**THE RETREAT OF THE LOAS**

In 1989 Gro Mambo Angéla conceived the idea of a forest retreat, an opportunity for LePeristyle's family, membership, supporters and clients to study and practice the Voodoo belief system within the relaxed context of a forest setting. Following some research, Gro Mambo Angéla settled upon PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK (25 miles south of Washington, D.C.) that has excellent facilities for camping: comfortable screened cabins, bathing facilities and a complete modern cooking and dining facility, all of which is set within a primordial, pied-mont forest.

During the First Annual Retreat of the Loas in August 1990, the LePeristyle family enjoyed three (3) full days of relaxation, meditation, workshops, indoor and outdoor Voodoo ceremonies and a fantastic experience of spiritual fellowship and friendship.

There have been ten (10) Annual Retreats of the Loas each one proving to be more spiritually enlightening and educational. The Retreat has grown to the following:

Theme dinners centered around the food, colors and dress of the Loa

Increased meditation exercises

Spiritual Awareness sessions

Ritual

Ceremonies, Bath, Celebratory and healing (i.e. mud bath)

Master African Dance and Drum Classes

Divination readings and cleansing baths

# MILESTONES

## The Divine Messages of the Loas

Throughout the course of the last two (2) decades, the Divine Loas of the Haitian Voodoo have come through the medium of divine possession through direct communication with Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol during various services and ceremonies. They have provided advice, instruction and information for correct conduct. These messages have been documented for prosperity.

As the volume of the archives accumulated, Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón was directed by the Loa to prepare the messages for formal presentation in written form to the general public at large. In 1989, Gro Mambo Angéla with the assistance of her staff began to compile and edit these messages. The resulting document was assembled into a hard copy, library bound book entitled, *The Divine Messages of the Loa*. This book is the first presentation of African-based religions of the messages of the Seven Powers of Africa (Loas, Orisha, Deities, Ancestors, etc.). The book was well received by the extended Le Peristyle Haitian Sanctuary family. *The Divine Messages of the Loa* became a bible to some and a reference source to others. Readers found that they could re-read the messages and find even deeper meaning.

On April 23, 1991, a book party was held by LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary to celebrate the publication of *The Divine Messages of the Loas, Volume II*. The value of the messages are not changed and the presentation is awesome. Printed in a laser-printed easy to read font, the layout is superb, replete with graphic illustrations of veves (symbolic representations of the Loas) and photos of services and ceremonies. Also included in Volume II are color lithographs of the African divine forces (Loa, Orisa), Ersulie Dantour, Ersulie Freeda and Papa Ogu.

*Volume II, The Divine Messages of the Loas* is full of powerful messages with divine guidance for all who desire to grow and evolve to become what God put us on this earth for.

## **MILESTONES**

### **Spirit Cultural Dance Ensemble: Evolution and Expansion**

Spirit Cultural Dance Ensemble was conceived as an indigenous community-based dance instruction and performance cultural organization, “Spirit” has enjoyed tremendous success and acclaim throughout the Delaware Valley. Spirit Cultural Dance Ensemble routinely provides exhibition of the full panoply of African dance idioms and styles representing a cross-section of African cultures.

The most popular presentations of “Spirit” have been the “Agwe Suite.” This suite had been presented many times, the most memorable being its debut at the Robin Hood Dell and a performance at the Germantown Friends Theatre. As a result, the debut of the Agwe Suite gave birth to “African-American Night.” The Agwe Suite is a formalized, tightly choreographed presentation of a Voodoo ceremony containing many elements of an authentic service.

#### **Agwe De Voodaun Suite: The Play**

Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón had operated Spirit Cultural Dance Ensemble for more than sixteen (16) years in 1991. In that year, the Agwe Suite was presented with a new twist. Whereas, it was formerly presented as a music and dance experience, the “suite” was modified and expanded into the form a dramatic presentation with the music and dance segment wrapped around “explanatory dialogue.” In its present form, “Agwe De Voodaun Suite: The Play,” provides an opportunity for those unfamiliar with Haitian Voodoo to understand the function and practice of the religion. It shows the purpose of Voodoo, its relationship to other world belief systems/religions and the role it plays in everyday life. It dispels the myth of Voodoo, as witchcraft, sorcery and/or black magic. “Agwe De Voodaun Suite: The Play” is both a piece of excellent entertainment and an experience in living African culture. The “Agwe De Voodaun Suite: The Play” had its debut at the Friends School in Germantown and was supported by a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.



THE MANY YEARS  
OF  
ERSULIE FREEDA



**MILESTONES**  
**A SPECIAL BLESSING**  
**FROM**  
**ERSULIE FREEDA AND PAPA DUMBALA**

Palm Sunday, March 24, 2002 marked the 21<sup>st</sup> year of this miraculous combination of peace and love. This service begins early in the morning with a ceremony for the Loa Aizian. Aizian is the keeper of the palms and the Loa that is responsible for the person who is being initiated on any level. The Ceremony of the Palms is a sacred service of prayers, drumming and dancing. Some of the women (initiates) strip the palms, while moving in a circular fashion around the Peristyle within the Humofor. After the palms have been stripped in a hanging fashion, they are placed on a chair with a white cloth. Communion is then taken with corn meal and honey and the palms are kissed by each individual in gratitude for the life and death of Jesus Christ.

The Service marks the first day of the seven (7) day fast. The fast will be broken after the Easter Sunday Communion. While fasting, prayers are offered at sunrise, sunset and at night.

The Tradition of "Breaking the Fast" is to break it on Easter Sunday with a feast. Each family member of LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary brings a dish.



**PAPA AQWE'S  
CEREMONY...**



**FROM  
HAITI...**



**TO THE SHORES  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES**



## **MILESTONES**

### **A SPECIAL BLESSING FROM PAPA AGWE AND ERSULIE DANTOUR**

July 6, 2002 will marked the 21<sup>st</sup> year Anniversary of the Annual Service and Bath for Papa Agwe and Ersulie Dantour. The ceremony is held at the ocean and is one of the Annual Spiritual Upliftments and Gifts of LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary. Each year the service involves two (2) phases: a formal ceremony in the Humofor, bath on the beach and the formal presentation of an altar launched from a boat at sea. The colorful, dramatic series of ceremonies provide a unique opportunity for the family of LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary, fellowshippers, supporters, clients and all who participate to grow in the Voodoo religion and to obtain the blessings of three (3) very unique and powerful Loas.

When the service begins we pay our respect to Papa Legba first. Papa Agwe governs the winds above the ocean and the earth. The power of the winds in hurricanes is a manifestation of Papa Agwe. This force is symbolized by the wind which always blows in a definite, specific direction, providing a sense of perspective and direction in life. The Loa Ersulie Dantour whose physical manifestation is the ocean (the foundation and origin of life) is the mother of all. Ersulie Dantour governs the family with all of its complexity: the family unit (mother, father, child, the home). All the other Loas pay homage to this wonderful extraordinary Petro Loa. Each year the ceremonies is conducted in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

FROM THE  
SHRINE  
IN HAITI



TO THE SOIL  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES

THE LOA  
BARON CRIMINEL  
AND GHEDE



# MILESTONES

## THE GHEDE SERVICE

The very first Ghede Ceremony given by Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol was in November 1985. Prior to this, Gro Mambo Angéla historically went to her Godfather's Humofor in Haiti to celebrate Ghede season for the rituals and the bath. The reason for this is simple, although her Godfather trained her well in the skills and practice of the Ghede system, it was her high regard and respect for the Ghede system that kept her protective of it from the eyes of stereotyped Americans - both Black and White.

The media in the United States has done a terrible or fantastic job whichever way you view it, of bastardizing the Voodoo religion for profit in books and films. At the very center of that destruction was the Loa Baron and the Ghede system. Since the Loa Baron and the Ghede system was greatly misunderstood and maligned, Gro Mambo Angéla went to work, first on the media and then on the public at large, to tear down the walls of ignorance confronting any infraction she found or any that was pointed out to her.

Then, in 1985, she did the first Ghede Ceremony and Service in Philadelphia at LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary. It was spiritually a marvelous success. The multi-religious gathering at Le Peristyle consisted of Priests, Priestesses, initiates and the curious. By the end of the ceremony, every person who attended was spiritually uplifted, in awe and most of all in love with the Loa Baron. The fast rhythm of the shantes, drumming and dancing combined with the raw truth of the words from the Loa in consultation, made every person a true believer in the validity of the Ghede system and also in the Loa Baron. The Loa Baron is a very important force of the Voodoo religion and is worthy of recognition and praise.

Due to the open efforts of Gro Mambo Angéla the news media both print and film began to carry her battle to right a wrong that was years overdue. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* has award-winning photographs of the Loa Baron. The only knowledge held by the casual observer of the Ghede system or of the Loa Baron was that of him as a force of the dead and they were quick to exploit that knowledge to condemn the practice and the properties of the system by misrepresenting the forces as zombies, pins in dolls and skeletons. Because of Gro Mambo Angéla, the world now understands that when they see Baron and the Ghede at work, they are observing a master physician who sustains the life of those who are dying of unnatural causes, and raises them to a level of life where other forces can bring the person to good health and healing.

Another task in your service of God, well done Gro Mambo Angéla.

# THE GROWTH OF THE ALTAR



1982



1987



1992

## **MILESTONES**

### **ALTAR: A Grand Offering**

The altar erected by Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol has been deemed by world-renowned freelance photographer Roland Freeman as the largest of its kind in the world. According to Mr. Freeman, who has traveled extensively around the world for National Geographic magazine and the Smithsonian Institution, the closest altar exalted to its size was one constructed in India.

The altar consists of spiritual items glorifying the Loa (divine forces) of the Haitian Voodoo. It is decorated with an array of the most vivid and boldly, beautifully colored silk, satin and lace cloths. Included on the altar are spiritual articles such as: favorite beverages of the Loa, candles, perfumes, flowers, fruits, cakes, decorated bottled in colorful sequins with pictures of the various Loa, and also hand sewn sequined ceremonial flags of the Loa that give the altar a most elegant and grand appearance. This altar, erected by Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol, is unlike any other altar ever seen. It was photographed by Roland Freeman and appeared in the August 1990 edition of National Geographic. It is also filed in the archives at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Truly an extraordinary accomplishment to add to a long list of others made by this High Priestess of Haitian Voodoo, Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol.



## **MILESTONES**

### **A Precedent for African Religions of the Diaspora: 501(c)(3)**

Under the spiritual tutelage and guidance of Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol, in December 1989, LePeristyle Haitian Sanctuary successfully achieved 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status as legal church for the Voodoo religion in the United States. This historical precedent was a landmark as it was the first time in American history that any African-based religion, as far as we know, was able to acquire such status.

There were a number of attempts on behalf of African religious organizations to achieve tax-exempt status as a religion. However, their efforts failed. Many resolved this dilemma by applying for non-profit status as a cultural organization instead of a religious organization and quietly practiced under the guise of African Culture.

However, all of that can change for the destiny of these African religions, which exist secretly and/or quietly in America. The precedent, which bases itself on freedom of worship as described in the Constitution, was land marked by the Voodoo religion that is practiced in Haiti and brought to America by Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol.

Decades may pass before African-Americans realize that a great and difficult task was accomplished. Regardless of their understanding or knowledge of its powerful impact, other organizations can successfully acquire their tax-exempt status as a legal recognized African religious group.

Gro Mambo Angéla is currently planning workshops to provide management and technical assistance to other African religious groups on how they too can acquire tax-exempt status. These workshops will guide the organizations step by step to achieve their status.

## **MILESTONES**

### **THE NATIONAL AFRICAN RELIGION CONGRESS NARC WORLD**

The National African Religion Congress is an international organization founded by Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol to foster unity among religions of the African diaspora. The organization came into existence by default. First Gro Mambo received a message from Papa Ogu about the need for unity among African-based religions. Then the Loa Mali Louise issued a mandate for the unification of all African religions of the diaspora. Gro Mambo attempted to implement these mandates of the Loa through existing organizations by passing on the Loa messages to the leaders of all of the major religions of the African diaspora. She met strong resistance and resentment. But, because she had received the message she had no choice but to move forward, even if it became necessary to start a new organization. She held a unity conference and ceremony in New Orleans, visited the African Village in Sheldon, S.C. and attended an international conference in San Francisco. She then incorporated the National African Religion Congress in January 1999 and called the 1<sup>st</sup> African Religion Unity Conference and Ceremony of Ceremonies for Easter Weekend 1999. She assembled a board of directors representing the religions of the African diaspora. Following the Loa mandate, Gro Mambo invested her own time and money toward the effort of organization. Following a period of four years, the National African Religion Congress has become a major institution, working on behalf of all priests and priestesses of African-based religions, especially those religions of the diaspora: Voodoo (Haiti), Candomble (Brazil), Lucumi/Santeria (the Latino Americas), Orisa Tradition of Trinidad/Tobago, Ifa/Orisa Worship of Nigeria and the Akan religion of Ghana.

The purpose of the organization is

- To represent African-based religions nationally and internationally
- To ensure freedom of religion and religious practice
- To ensure the right to perform ceremonies/rituals involving the sacrificing of animals,
- To ensure the right to hold public ceremonies, and
- To fight persecutions from other religions.

From its inception in January 1999, the organization has grown rapidly to an international organization of almost 2000 priests and priestesses. The membership of the NARC board comes from the United States, Nigeria, England, Brazil, Trinidad, Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela and Spain. The board represents every branch of the African spiritual family.

Representatives of all branches of the African religious diaspora have found unity and brotherhood under the umbrella of the National African Religion Congress. They have discovered the strength of numbers and the effectiveness of having a body to represent their mutual interests. The accomplishments of NARC are impressive:

- Certification of almost 2000 priests and priestesses from around the world, especially the centers of religions of the African Diaspora
- Publication of an International Directory of Priests and Priestesses which is published annually containing the proceedings of each annual NARC conference and an in-depth description of each African-based religion: Voodoo, Santeria/Lucumi, Candomble, Orisa Tradition of Trinidad/Tobago, Ifa/Orisa worship of Nigeria and the Akan of Ghana. The Directory has become a major sourcebook on African religion for university and public libraries throughout the United States.
- NARC membership seminars have been held in many cities, especially the eastern U.S. (New York, Washington, D.C., New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Atlanta, Houston) and internationally (Trinidad, Haiti and Brazil). Requests for NARC certification seminars have come from throughout the United States and from around the world. A major effort is being planned for Nigeria, Ghana, Cuba and Trinidad/Tobago.
- The Department of the Treasury has granted a license allowing NARC to legally travel to Cuba. This license can be extended to allow any NARC member to legally travel to Cuba.
- Official branches or "stations" of NARC have been established in Nigeria (Ile-Ife and Lagos) and in Haiti.
- A large movement has begun in Nigeria called "NARC-Youth" of which the goal is the return of Yoruba people back to traditional religion from the practices of Islam and Christianity.
- A major objective of NARC is to gain recognition by medical insurance agencies for the healing practices of priests and priestesses. This objective would allow them to receive payment for healing practices by medical insurance providers. This is a great challenge but it is within the realm of possibility if priests and priestesses work together in unity under the umbrella of NARC.
- The annual NARC International African Religion Unity Conference and Ceremony of Ceremonies brings together priests and priestesses from around the world to celebrate and plan the progress of African religious unity.
- NARC has forced American institutions to grant time off for African-based religious holidays, celebrations and initiations.
- NARC requires urban municipalities to provide Priests and Priestesses with parking permits.
- NARC is the Secretariat of the National African Religion Congress/NARC World.



## **MEDIA CLIPS & TELEVISION SEGMENTS**

### **1999-2005    Print Media:**

National Geographic, The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine, Miami Herald, New Orleans Times Picayne, New York Times, El Nuevo, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Del la Sol, Haiti En Marche, Philadelphia Metro, Philadelphia Weekly, Philadelphia Tribune, The Philadelphia Sun., Philadelphia New Observer, Community Focus/Enfoque Comunal, SCOOP USA, Associated Press, The Black Suburban Journal, Germantown Courier, Mt Airy Times Express, Knight Ridder Newspaper, City Paper.

### **Television Media:**

A&E Channel, Unsolved Mysteries, Discovery, Philly-Live 35, CN8 News, Drexel University Public Television Channel, Green Star Television.

### **Radio Broadcast:**

102 JAMZ-FM, WRTI, WDAS, WHAT AM, Power-99, WPED; Web Live-Span Radio: Black Voices,

INSIDE: GIVING AT THE OFFICE TO YOURSELF

# INQUIRER

January 22, 1995

The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RON CORTES

## urban voodoo

A PHILADELPHIA MAMBO INVOKES THE ANCIENT SPIRITS OF HAITI.

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Wake up and smell the trend: It's America north, south, west and east of java.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY RON CORTES

COVER STORY

Voodoo is shedding its old stigmatized image and, under Philadelphia's Gro Mambo, attracting new followers and entering the computer age.

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#### COVER STORY:

Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol, grand priestess of a flourishing Philadelphia voodoo sanctuary, is possessed by a voodoo spirit, during a recent religious retreat. Photography by Ron Cortes

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY RON CORTES



# THE GRAND PRIESTESS OF

EVERY SUNDAY, SCORES OF PHILADELPHIANS take a spiritual journey, transported by faith and ritual, from the basement of Angela Novanyon's Fern Rock home to the Caribbean island nation of Haiti.

Beating drums, chanting songs, sacrificing animals, and communing with spirits, they are all believers in Haitian voodoo and devotees of Novanyon, the Gro Mambo, or grand priestess, who has built an active following at her Le Peristyle Haitian Sanctuary.

Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol is the former Jocelya Smith of North Philadelphia, a former computer coder for Sears turned Haitian priestess in a religion that mixes aspects of Catholicism with ancient African rituals brought to Haiti by slaves.

For a decade, she studied with some of Haiti's best mambos and hungans, or voodoo priests, deep inside the country's rural provinces before establishing her thriving Philadelphia sanctuary. Much of the Gro Mambo's knowledge was gleaned in places where time seems frozen, where people live without electricity or modern conveniences. But her high-tech Philadelphia sanctuary a half-mile east of Broad and Olney is already on the information superhighway, with three computers, fax machine and modern.

Mambo Angela, as she is known to the faithful, has also written two books and lectured on voodoo at the University of Pennsylvania.

As voodoo draws new adherents here and around the world, it is gaining recognition, slowly shedding its old stigmatizing images of black magic, witch doctors and voodoo dolls. Although many people still think of voodoo as the sole province of primitive peoples in backward lands, voodoo and similar religions that mix Christian and African ritual are widespread.

African Americans in the Deep South practice a variation they call roots. Jamaicans have Obia. In Cuba and other Spanish-speaking countries, the religion is known as Santeria. And in Brazil, it's macumba or candomble.

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RON CORTES is an Inquirer staff photographer.

**Mambo Angela during a Sunday service (right), possessed by the voodoo spirit known as Papa Ogu, the force that governs the fires above the earth. During a possession, the faithful believe, the spirits use the mambo to send messages to worshipers. At work in the office she has set up in her house (above), the Gro Mambo writes about her religion and supervises her growing following.**



MAMBO ANGELA  
PAGE 3 VOODOO  
OUT OF HAITI  
AND THE  
SINISTER OUT OF  
VOODOO







## Voodoo

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Like the faithful of many religions, the Mambo's followers, or "godchildren," as they call themselves, worship with song and prayer. But they also go into trance-like dances to summon spiritual forces known as loas. They sacrifice goats, chickens and lambs as offerings to the loas, or shower the spirits with gifts of rose petals and perfumes.

"They can all come at any time," Mambo says of the spirits. "The loas are messengers and workers of God. We invoke them through song and prayer."

The Mambo takes followers on weekend retreats to places like Prince William Forest Park in Virginia, valued for its fertile soil. There the worshipers heighten their spirituality by bathing in a mud-filled hole to cleanse their physical and spiritual selves. Sometimes herbs and flowers or bread and cookies are tossed in as offerings. Perfume is poured in, even champagne.

"It's all for the elevation for the spirit, the body, the mind and the soul," Mambo says. "That is done in a hole because the earth is where you come from, and the earth, when you die, is where you go back to."

"The hole is to get in and to pray as you're bathing . . . so when you step out of the hole, whatever sickness you have, you leave in the hole."

During the ceremony the faithful float gifts of thanks — cookies, cakes and other foodstuffs — down the Quantico Creek on a raft to honor the loas.

The Philadelphia godchildren are mostly local African Americans from various religious backgrounds. Some are professionals, doctors and lawyers, while others are laborers or homemakers. They share a feeling of detachment from so-called mainstream religions, and, in voodoo, they seek deeper cultural and religious connections to their ancestral pasts. There are a sprinkling of whites and Latinos, who, like the rest of the flock, want greater understanding of the spiritual forces they believe guide all lives.

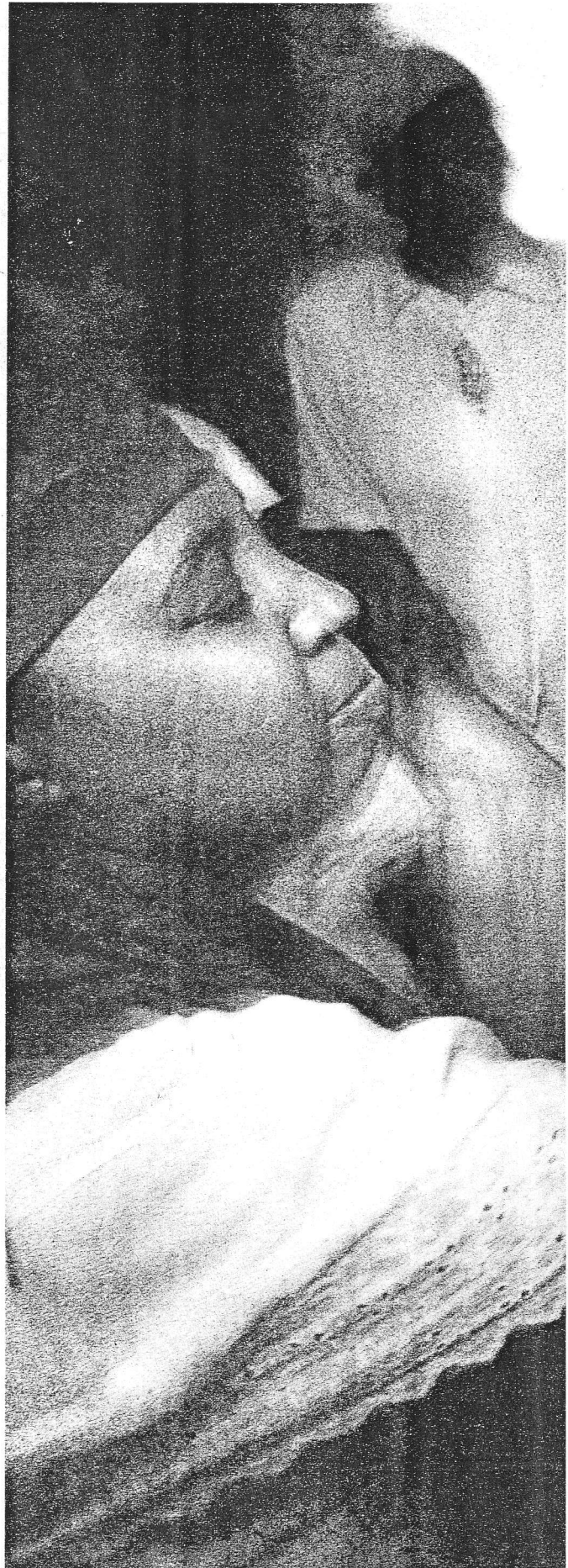
Mambo counts 50 regular followers locally and at least 200 others who come to her occasionally for spiritual renewal or for help with specific problems, drawn by her religious teachings and her charismatic personality. Through the Gro Mambo, the faithful seek spiritual guidance from Papa Ogu (fire spirit), Mali Louise (spirit of fate), Papa Dumbala (spirit of wisdom), and other loas that they believe regularly possess the Mambo and her followers.

— Marjorie Valbrun

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Mambo Angela dabs goat blood on the foreheads of worshipers during a celebration at the Fern Rock sanctuary (right). Waiting for Sunday services to begin, choir leader Marie Terressa reads a magazine with initiates Fontout Dowell and Womande Catanch (above).







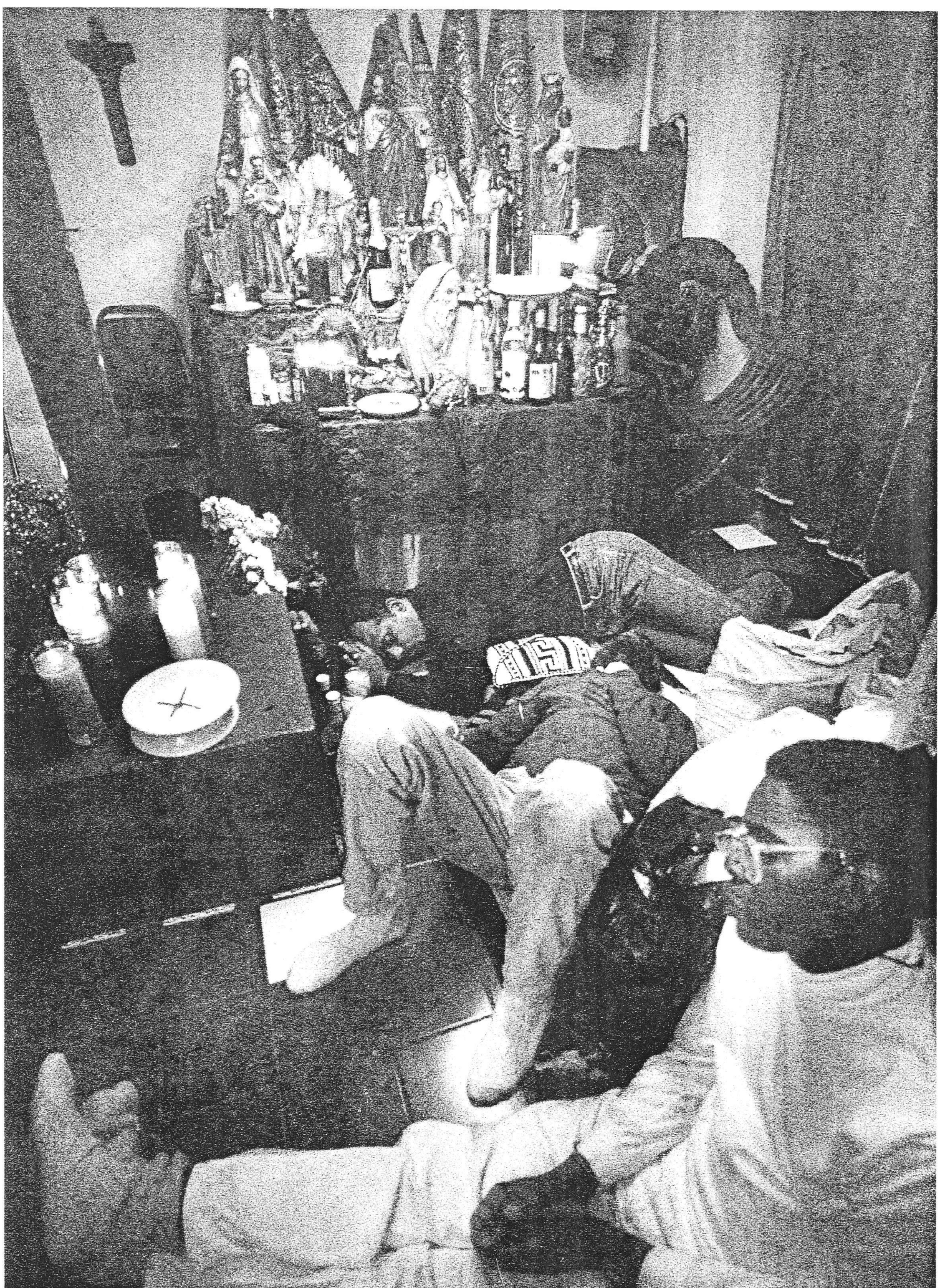




**The Gro Mambo and Juan Amour DeKusepet, a voodoo priest, relax in her backyard hot tub (above), as Kon-tanavi Foley serves a meal. Congregants prepare to offer a chicken sacrifice to the loas (right, top and bottom); Mambo Angela sprays the bird with liquor as part of the sanctifying ritual. After nearly three days of worship, members of the congregation sleep on the floor of the “humofor,” or sanctuary (facing page).**

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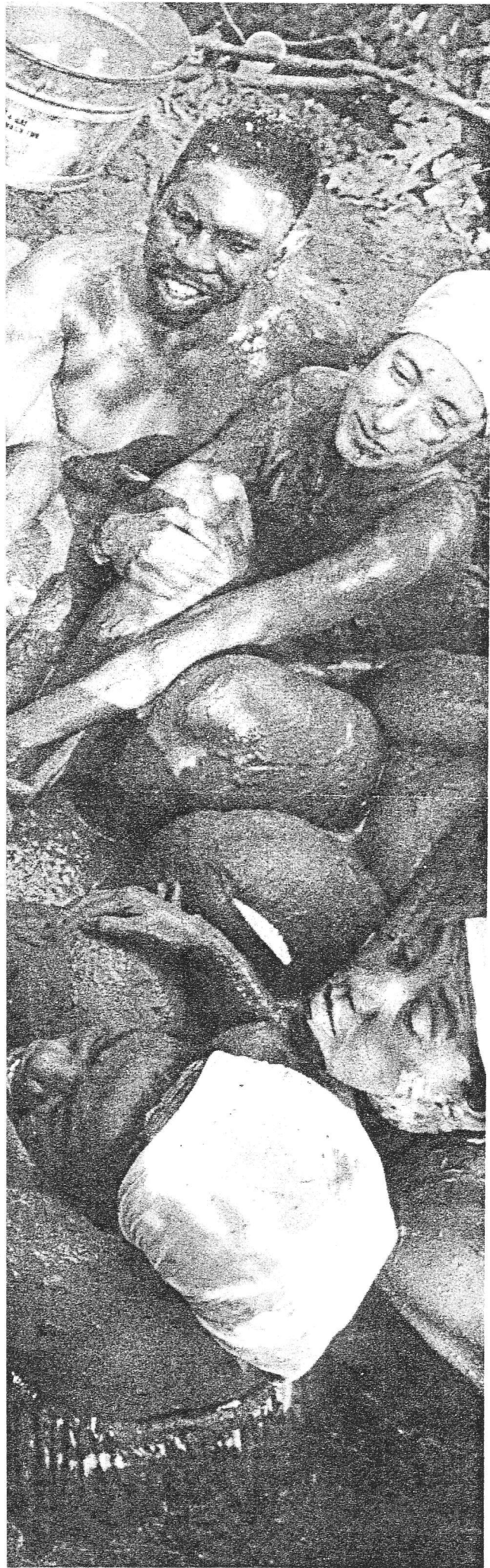












In a ritual mudbath in Virginia to cleanse body and spirit, Mambo Angela is possessed by Mali Louise, the spirit of fate and destiny (far left). In less ecstatic moments, she complains about her tired feet to initiates Renee Jefferson, Kanzo Chemiel Fefe and Irma Day (above) and treats Keith Todd's hand, injured in a fall (left). Before dinner, congregants perform a traditional Haitian dance (below).

*Photographs continued on next page*

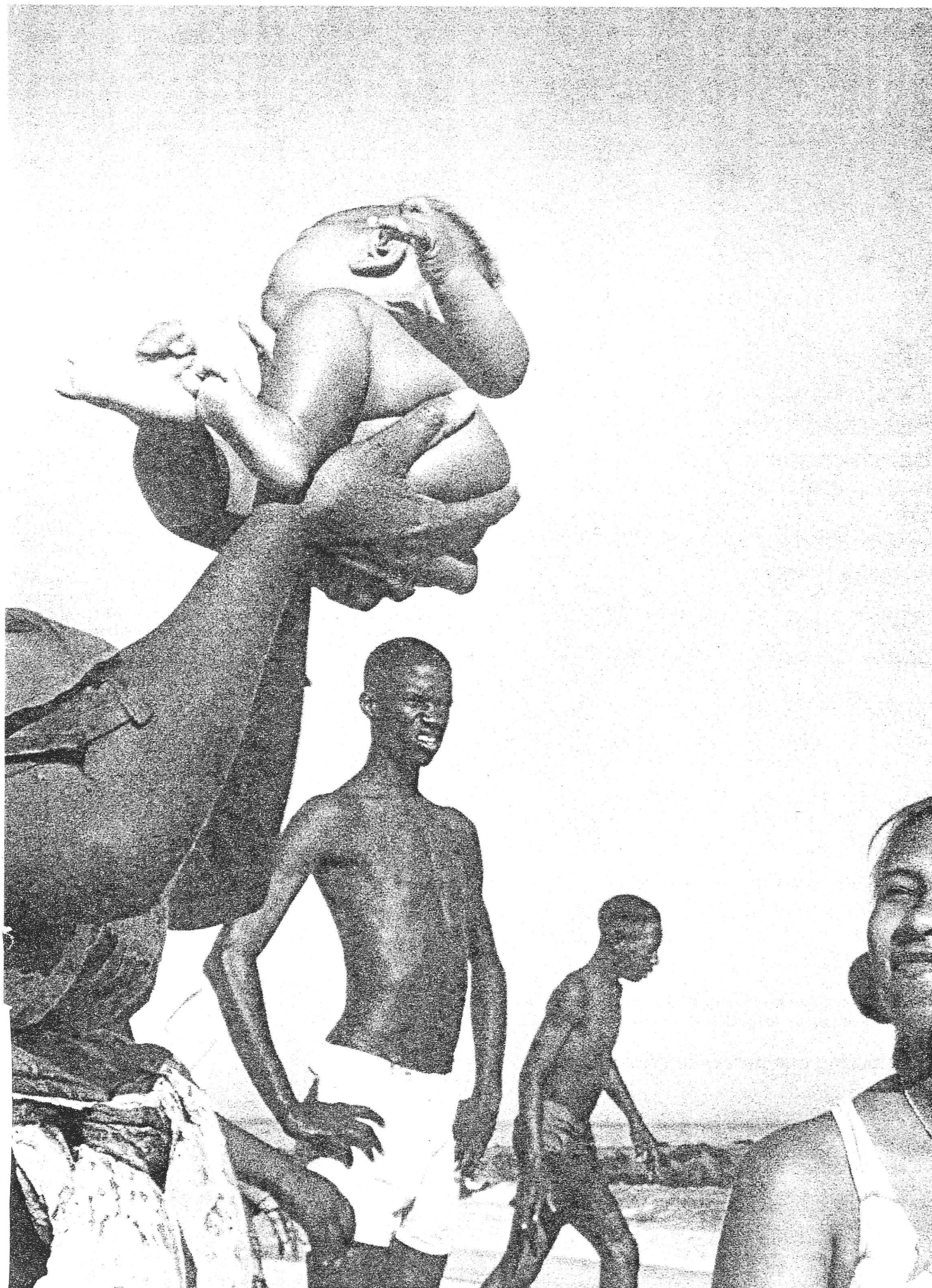






The Gro Mambo, possessed by water loa Erusile Dantour, holds young Fleurjedye Ware on the Atlantic City beach (far right), asking the blessing of the spirits of the oceans and the winds, under the watchful eye of mother Shante Ware. During the annual visit to the shore, the mambo is surrounded by the faithful after invoking the spirit of the ocean (above), and Jenkanpe Josses is bathed in rice and herbs (right). An initiate, Kanzo Mimose Kle, is assisted by fellow believers during the ritual bathing (below). ☐







Vol. 325, No. 113

Adherents say the misunderstood religion is a cultural connection to their African past.

## Capturing the spirit of voodoo

By Ralph Cipriano and Mary Jane Fine  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

Mambo Angela Novanyon pours rum on her hands, then cups her fingers around a candle. There's a burst of blue flame. Mambo rubs her face with the fiery liquid. A clap of her hands, and the flame dies out.

The high priestess of voodoo is ready.

For more than three hours, she and a group of voodoo followers have beaten hollow wooden drums and chanted songs and prayers in Creole. Mambo, who has undergone a visible transformation, is possessed, her followers say, by Papa Ogu — in voodoo, the spiritual force that governs the fires above the Earth.

And now, in a ceremony that honors that spiritual force, Mambo straddles a black and white goat and brandishes a paring knife.

It's long past midnight. Less than half a mile east of Broad and Olney — 1,600 miles north of Haiti — Mambo Angela, the former Jocelya Smith, Germantown High School Class of 1970, is hosting a Haitian



The Philadelphia Inquirer / RON TARVER

**As drumbeats and chanting** fill the air, Mambo Angela Novanyon, the only African American high priestess of Haitian voodoo, takes on the personality of the "loa," or spiritual force, of destiny and fate during a Sunday service at her Fern Rock home.

voodoo ceremony. It takes place in the basement of her brick house in the Fern Rock section.

Mambo — the word is Haitian for priestess — is a former computer coder for Sears and a former lead dancer for Arthur Hall's African dance group who went to Haiti to learn voodoo. She is one of the few African Americans to achieve the

rank of high priestess.

In Haiti, where she was initiated into voodoo, Mambo lived in the bush country, slept in the same clothes for days and ate meat from sacrificed goats and chickens.

But back in the states, she's a thoroughly modern Mambo who drives a new smoke-colored Mer-

See **VOODOO** on A14

# Adherents call voodoo a link to African heritage

## VOODOO from A1

cedes, writes books on her three computers and delivers guest lectures on voodoo at the University of Pennsylvania.

"It's just the business of modern society," she says, sitting on the pink leather sofa in her living room during a recent interview. "And we have to be equipped to deal with the business of modern society."

Mambo is teaching the ancient religion to 50 followers, mostly African Americans, who call themselves godchildren. In voodoo, the godchildren say, they found something lacking in other religions, a deep cultural connection with Africa.

"This is the element missing in African American life," says George Ware, 51, one of the godchildren. "We try to make it in the American world, and we do pretty well, but there's an element missing, and I think this is it."

Ware is a former chemist and mathematics professor at Goddard and Hunter Colleges. Now he publishes a rap music magazine and is Mambo's unpaid public relations director.

Mambo's godchildren include a doctor and a few lawyers, social workers and secretaries, a Tyler School of Art professor and an international commodities broker. They are former Baptists and Buddhists, Muslims and Pentecostals, Catholics and agnostics. They all come to Mambo to learn the religion that combines African rituals and elements of Catholicism.

Mambo looks different whenever she is transformed, or possessed. She usually wraps her straight hair in a white kerchief, and on this night, she's wearing what she refers to as her "Smokey-the-Bear hat." But the transformation runs deeper than that. Her radiant smile is replaced by a pout. Her smooth face looks bloated. Under her heavy eyelids, only the barest sliver of white is visible.

When Mambo is Mambo, she laughs uncontrollably at times and has a hint of flirtatiousness in her husky voice. But when she is possessed by Papa Ogu, her femininity disappears: After dispatching the goats, she sits on the tile floor of the voodoo sanctuary, smokes a fat cigar and waves a gift from a godchild, a bottle of rum. "*Merci beaucoup! Merci beaucoup!*" she screeches in Creole.

Papa Ogu is just one of many spiritual forces or *loas* that regularly possess Mambo and the godchildren. In voodoo, the *loas* are the messengers of God, revealing truths that benefit humanity.



**Possessed by Mali Louise**, the "loa" of destiny and fate, Mambo Angela Novanyon dances at a Sunday voodoo service at her home.

"Are you with me," Mambo yells to the godchildren. "Kenyatta, you awake?"

Robert Kenyatta, who has drummed with John Coltrane, the Beach Boys and Wilson Pickett, is infamous for falling asleep on the job. The loas do not like this.

"I'm awake," he calls back.

It's a regular Sunday morning service at Le Peristyle Haitian Sanctuary. Inside the crowded voodoo sanctuary, known as a *humofor*, it's as hot as Haiti.

The godchildren are barefoot and dressed all in white; the men and boys in white shirts and pants, the women and girls in white headwraps, blouses and long skirts. They dance around an altar covered with flowers and candles and plaster statues of Jesus Christ, the Black Madonna and several saints.

"*Aaayeeee-bobo*," Mambo chants. It's Creole for praise God. "*Aaayeeee-bobo*," Mambo's followers chant.

Three drummers beat tall wooden *rada* drums covered with the skin of bulls. The drumbeat moves fast, slow, then fast again, challenging the dancers to keep pace. White skirts swish, bare feet move rhythmically on the tile floor. Women fan their faces with woven straw fans. A chilled bottle of water passes from hand to hand.

A woman melts to the floor in what looks like a slow-motion faint. Mambo shakes a gourd rattle over the woman's shoulders. Moments later, the woman lies face down on the tile floor, her legs kicking convulsively. Then she wiggles, snakelike, across the floor.

She is possessed, the godchildren say, by Papa Dumbala, the loa of wisdom. Soon, two other women are crawling across the floor.

Mambo's eyes are closed and she sings and dances and shakes a rattle. Several godchildren hug her. Mambo wears a straw hat, a denim jacket with epaulets on it and a denim skirt. She

begins to stagger around the room.

Mambo is possessed, this time by Mali Louise, the loa who governs fate and destiny. Her face looks swollen, her lips are set in a scowl.

Mali Louise walks slowly through the crowd, stopping to talk to a woman. Mali Louise speaks firmly in Creole while a priest, or *hungan*, translates quietly.

"You are walking strong," Mali Louise tells her. "You do not let men and women see you cry, but you are crying inside." The woman begins sobbing. Mali Louise speaks soothingly to the woman for several minutes.

Next, Mali Louise turns to a man named Ali. She is not there to comfort him.

"How come you don't pray when you are weak?" she booms at him. He gets down on his knees. As the godchildren put it, Ali is about to be "busted" by the loas.

"Didn't you understand there would be a problem if you did drugs?"

"Yes Mali Louise," he replies meekly.

Mali Louise summons another woman to testify about the evils of drugs.

"Did your man get mixed up in drugs?"

"*Oui*, Mali Louise," she replies.

"Where's your man now?"

"He dead, Mali Louise."

"You want to walk that way?" she yells at Ali. "Finish your drugs today!"

Mali Louise shakes hands in the crowd — first the right, then the left. It's not Mambo's polite handshake, but a powerful jerk that takes many of the men by surprise. Mali Louise carries a bottle with her, and she offers it to several people. It's *clarin*, a Haitian moonshine made from sugar cane. No one refuses. Mali Louise continues to walk, seemingly without ever opening her eyes.

Before she departs, Mali Louise has a message for the Haitians. She speaks proudly of the 1791 slave revolt that led to the founding of Haiti, the hemisphere's first black republic.

And then Mali Louise has this to say about Haitians trying to escape. "They are taking to the ships," she yells. "Where are they going? Why have they come to this land? The battle is in Haiti. You run, you lose, because only losers run. . . . If the men and women have hope to take the ships to go to a new land, then they should have used that hope to fight the battle in Haiti."

After 4½ hours of drumming, chanting and dancing, the godchildren hold hands in a circle for a farewell prayer. "God be with you until we see you again," they say. Then a woman makes an announcement about raffle tickets.

Voodoo's influence on Roseanne O'Connor and John Dowell is hard to miss. A candle-and-flower-filled altar

dominates their living room. Dowell always wears white, even when he's working with paints or clay. He credits voodoo with ending his need for anti-depressant medication. O'Connor thinks about becoming a priestess.

O'Connor, 38, a painter who is white and was raised Catholic, is married to Dowell, 51, an African American artist and composer of national reputation who is chairman of the Tyler School of Art's printmaking department. Dowell was raised a Baptist and practiced Buddhism for 10 years. He went through therapy, behavioral groups and Gestalt before he found voodoo.

Dowell remembers his wife's reaction when he first went to see Mambo: "She flipped out. When I said, 'I've been to a voodoo service,' she lost it."

O'Connor says she and her husband nearly separated when he invited Mambo over for a ritual housecleaning that involved a chicken sacrifice. But in August, O'Connor was initiated into voodoo. The godchildren call her Mamma Rinmin Lavia Bel, Creole for "to love living life beautifully."

"I am married, obviously, to a man of African American descent," she says, explaining why a woman of Irish-German descent follows voodoo. "I live in North Philadelphia. This is my life. But that is the surface; there's more to it than that. I feel the source of the whole universe coming through Africa. It seems logical to me. . . . There is something spiritual that is very important. Voodoo has really

caught the essence of it."

Now O'Connor is trying to explain how a few days earlier, she ended up on the floor, moving like a snake.

"It's a strong . . . I don't know, just a strong pull, and when you go, you go," she says. When the possession's over, she is disoriented, she says.

"You're just trying to get a grip on where you are and what's going on," she says. "It's like being awakened out of a sound sleep. [But] I always feel extraordinarily peaceful."

O'Connor frequently is possessed at the Sunday voodoo service; Dowell has never been possessed. "You never really know who a loa's going to be drawn to," Mambo explains. "Some people are just open vehicles. They can possess at any time."

At age 9, Mambo says, her dreams began coming true.

Like the one about her uncle lying in a coffin — a few days before he died. And the dream about her fiance lying on the side of the highway. She begged him not to drive his red Camaro on Interstate 95, she recalls. He died a few days later during a bizarre pair of accidents, she says, after telling Mambo she had to choose between her religion and him.

Newspaper accounts said Raymond King, 28, after being involved in a three-car accident in the northbound lane, either walked into or was thrown into a separate 11-car pile-up in the southbound lane moments later. He was found pinned under a car.

Mambo got involved with African religions when she couldn't find a cure for migraine headaches that plagued her for four months. She tried eyeglasses, pills and doctors without relief. Then an African priestess told Mambo that the deities were trying to get her attention. After she got involved in African religions, her headaches disappeared, she said.

Mambo, who declines to give her age, was born in North Philadelphia, the first child of Bertha and Joseph Smith. Her mother was a school-crossing guard, her father, a career military man. Both parents are devout Baptists.



"I remember the first time I possessed at my mother's house," Mambo says, smiling at the memory. "My heart started beating, *boom, boom*, and the sweat popped out. My vision got blurry. My girlfriend said to me," — she mimics her friend's horrified tone — '*Not here!*' As if I could control it.

"I fell outta my chair. My mother grabbed me and pinned me against the wall," Mambo says. She acts this out, pinning a priestess in training against the wall in a mock posture of crucifixion.

"And my mother said, 'She's talking in the language of the devil! Get back, Satan! Get back! Satan, leave my daughter!'" Mambo doubles over, shrieking with laughter.

Today, Bertha Smith also can laugh at the memory.

"I was very, very upset," she says. "I didn't know what she was doing. In my religion, we shout. Baptists shout. But she was doing, like, a dance. I told her, whatever she was doing, stop."

Mother and daughter now have an understanding.

"The main thing I wanted to know: Do they accept God the Father and Jesus the Son," Bertha Smith recalls.

The voodoo faithful do believe in God and Jesus Christ, whom they refer to as Jezu Kris. They also believe in the Holy Spirit, in the form of the loas.

Mambo is angry about the way her religion is maligned and stereotyped. She wants people to know that voodoo priests and priestesses — hun-gans and mambos — do not stick pins in "any damn dolls," as often portrayed in the movies.

Voodoo priests and priestesses, however, do engage in animal sacrifices.

"We kill chickens, we kill goats, sheep, bulls, turkeys, ducks, you name it," she said with a laugh. "It's really true, but it's the way that they [Hollywood] present it that bastardizes it. Our sacrifices are as clean and as sacred as any other religion."

It's after 9 on a weekday night. The doorbell rings at the sanctuary. A husky, bearded man playfully pokes his head inside the door, and asks, in low, mock-serious voice, "Good evening. Did anyone call for a hungan?"

The voodoo priest is George Turnage, 32, an international commodities broker. He's had a tough night shopping for suitable sacrifices.

"Ramadan ends next week, so the Muslims bought up all the goats," says Turnage, the man the godchildren call Papa Juan Amour. He says he was lucky to finally find a pair of goats.

The godchildren sacrifice goats once or twice a year — using procedures that the Pennsylvania SPCA considers acceptable "as long as there's no suffering, if it's a quick slaughter," said Elaine Newton, the SPCA's director of operations.

Turnage has overcome a lot of opposition about his religion from friends and family. He recalls that when he was initiated into voodoo, a half-dozen carloads of concerned pals showed up at the humofor with guns and baseball bats. "You ain't no zombie yet, are ya?" they yelled to Turnage. He was lying in a bed of initiation and wasn't supposed to move for three days.

Mambo wouldn't let Turnage out of the humofor. The boys left quietly after a little chat with Mambo.

"We gonna get this party started?" Ware asks.

Most of the children are playing

upstairs tonight. The adult godchildren head downstairs.

Master drummer Ahmed Lewis, 43, begins beating the drums. He is married to Mambo, and is the security manager at the University of Pennsylvania Bookstore.

The godchildren begin chanting. They also crack bullwhips and blow whistles.

The sacrifice is about to begin. Possessed by Papa Ogu, Mambo struts around the sanctuary, tilts her head up and blows clouds of cigar smoke. Then she takes a few hits from a rum bottle and blows several vapor plumes in the air. Next, she washes her face in burning rum.

The goats are finally led in after Mambo and the godchildren have been singing and praying and dancing and drumbeating for hours. One goat is black and white, the other gray. A woman carries a crowing rooster. The godchildren bathe the goats' hooves with water from a basin. Then they dry the goat with paper towels and swab the floors to keep the humofor pure for the sacrifices.

The godchildren kneel to say even more prayers. The first is the Lord's Prayer. The goats stand eerily at ease.

The possessed Mambo grabs the rooster. She plucks some feathers, then wrings the bird's neck. The bird violently flutters its wings, then is still. Mambo lays the rooster on the tile floor.

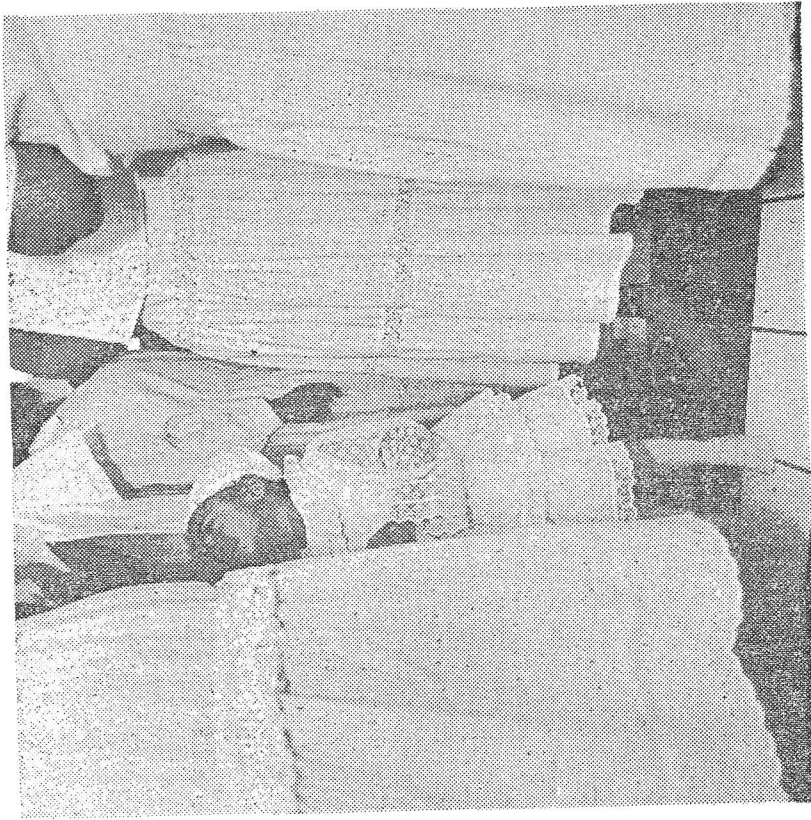
She straddles the black and white goat, brandishes a paring knife and rubs the goat's head with her free hand. When the goat is perfectly still, she drives the knife into the back of the goat's neck, numbing it for the kill. Then she slits the goat's throat.

She is just as efficient with the second goat. After she is finished, the godchildren carry off the limp gifts to the loas. Ware and Turnage begin to patiently butcher the two goats. The two men have the sign of the cross painted in blood on their foreheads.

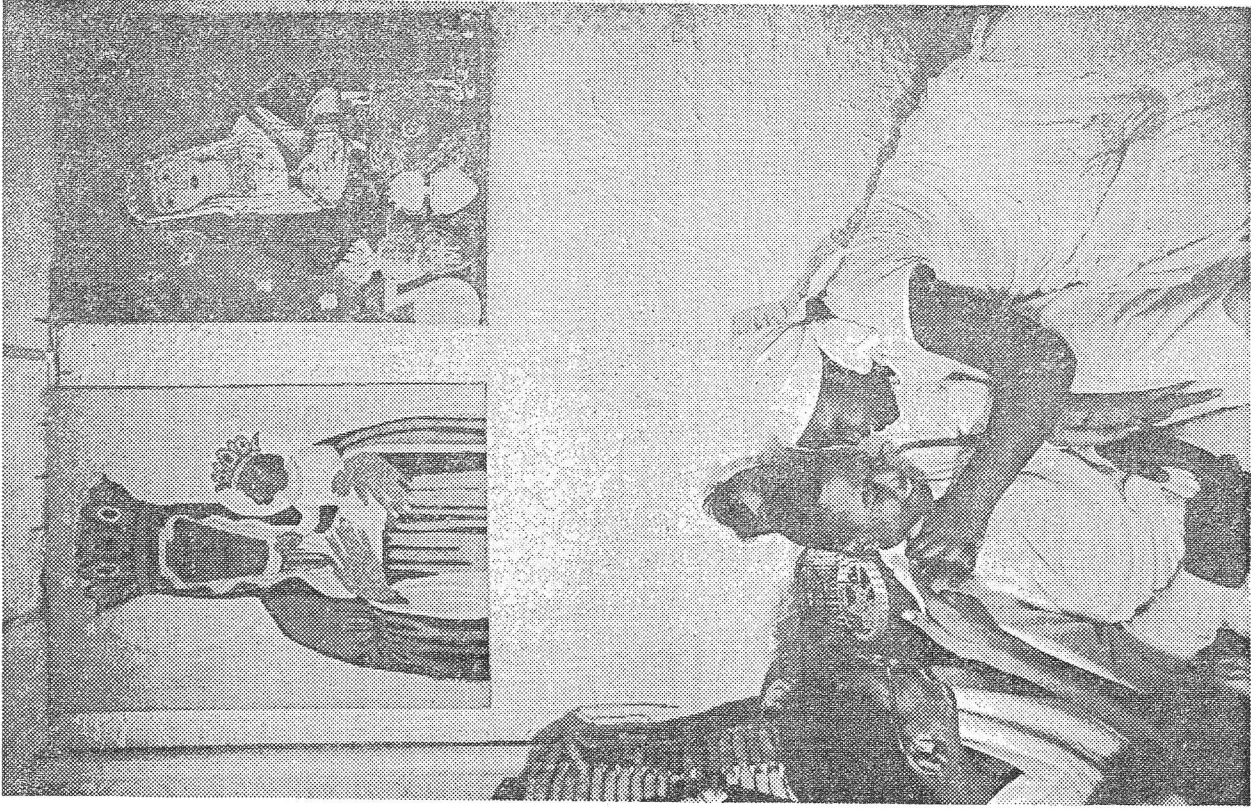
The skin of the goats will be used for drumheads. The meat will be salted. Some of it will be kept in the sanctuary; the rest, along with the rooster, will be distributed among the godchildren.

Mambo, still possessed by Papa Ogu, sits on the floor, a cigar in one hand, a rum bottle in the other. She explains in Creole that the rooster gave her some trouble, but that the goats didn't feel any pain.

"The meat has been blessed," she says, "so everybody can eat."



**Dressed in white lace,** Nadirah Foley, 3, tries to get her mother Lou's attention before the beginning of the voodoo ceremony.



The Philadelphia Inquirer / RON TARVER

**Beneath paintings of two "loas,"** or spiritual forces, Tracy Mathis (right) hugs Dawayne Day before the service. Rashad Foley is at left.



**INSIDE: VODOO  
MURDER ACQUITTAL**  
Plus: Dollars & Change,  
features and sports news

# VOODOO JUSTICE

*Judge Richette acquits 'spellbound'  
defendant of murder*

**Pages 4-5**



Judge Lisa Richette

## Voodoo Justice

# Killer pins

by Marisol Bello

Daily News Staff Writer

Theodore Stevens was convinced that his failing heart, worsening diabetes, growing dementia and the constant tingling in his legs were the result of an evil spell cast by his common-law wife.

He lived in fear that some unknown force sent by his wife would one day kill him.

So one morning, Stevens, half-blind and still recovering from recent heart surgery, grabbed his .38-caliber pistol and shot her once in the chest.

His wife of 20 years was dead. The spell was broken.

## Judge buys defendant's story that he feared deadly hexes

Yesterday, a Common Pleas judge bought Stevens' voodoo defense.

Judge Lisa Richette cleared the wheelchair-bound 69-year-old of murder and convicted him of involuntary manslaughter and other minor offenses. She ruled the shooting an accident.

For many, it is easy to dismiss voodoo and its belief in spirits, burning candles and animal sacrifice.

But for believers, the spells, known as ju-ju, are very real.

A voodoo high priestess and a priest of the African-based religion Santeria convinced the judge of the panic that grips a person who believes a ju-ju has been worked on them.

"Just thinking that someone is doing work on you can cause you to have a heart attack," testified Santero Ricardo Fresses. "It can affect the mind ... Voodoo is very



ASSOCIATED PRESS

After verdict, WWII vet Richard Keech waves to his family

## POW defense has no magic

by Michelle DeArmond

Associated Press

LONG BEACH, Calif. — A World War II veteran who claimed a flashback to a Japanese POW camp led him to kill his son-in-law was convicted yesterday of murder.

Prosecutors said Richard Keech, 77, concocted the story about wartime stress as an excuse for shooting Nicholas Candy, who was in the middle of a bitter divorce and custody battle with Keech's daughter.

Keech said he thought he was shooting a Japanese guard last May when he shot at his daughter's estranged husband, chased him down the street and fired four more times.

Keech could get 35 years in prison to life when sentenced Jan. 20.

Candy, 47, had come to the Keeches' home to get his 14-month-old son for a court-arranged visit.

When the two men argued, Keech said he "snapped" and went for the gun in his waistband, flashing back more than 50 years to the Philippines,

where he was a Marine in prisoner of war camps and saw hundreds die.

"I suddenly feel I'd killed a [Japanese] guard," Keech testified Oct. 10. "I guess I go back in my mind somewhere. I realize if you wound a [Japanese] guard, you're a dead man. I go on autopilot. Since you're a dead man, you may as well kill him."

The 2½-month trial featured expert testimony about post-traumatic stress disorder. Symptoms include flashbacks, a numbing of the senses, angry outbursts and sleep and concentration problems.

Some experts said it is possible for retirees to experience the symptoms when their thoughts are free from focusing on work. Keech retired 15 years ago from his job as a purchasing agent for Rockwell International Corp.

But Deputy District Attorney Amy Hannah Broersma said the post-traumatic stress defense was laughable.

"My initial reaction when I heard the defense was 'hee-hee, giggle-giggle. Come on, let's not lose our common sense here. That's ridiculous.'" ■

## YOU BE THE JUDGE

Former DA and now defense lawyer  
**F. Emmett Fitzpatrick:**  
"She's a student of humanity."

Richette says she asks herself:  
"What would Jesus do?"

Frank Rizzo:  
He labeled Richette  
"Let-'Em-Loose Lisa."



FILE PHOTOS

## Her jury's deadlocked

by John F. Morrison

Daily News Staff Writer

Relatives of murder victims shout and weep.

Prosecutors cringe, defense lawyers smile.

It's Common Pleas Judge Lisa A. Richette on the bench, dispensing justice with what she sees as a firm but compassionate hand, but with what her critics view as eccentricity and wrongheadedness.

Take last week: Screams of rage broke from the spectator seats where the family of murdered Tayon Timmons, 25, were gathered when Richette acquitted his accused killer, Shelbe Carter, 24.

"This ain't right!" cried one woman family member.

"You killed him like a dog!" she shouted at Carter.

Richette ruled there was insufficient evidence, but advised Carter, "If I were you, I would get out of town."

In October, Sylvia Bennett, 20, admitted she stabbed Robert L.

Hayes Jr., 19, to death, but said she did so while he was beating her. Richette put her on two years' probation and ordered her to undergo counseling.

Geoto Rivera, 23, shook her 4-month-old daughter to death last year, but when she came before Richette in April she got a five-year probationary sentence.

The prosecution called Rivera a frustrated and uncaring mother, but Richette said Rivera had a difficult childhood herself. She told the woman she was "just going to have to shape up."

The late Mayor Frank Rizzo tagged Richette "Let-'Em-Loose Lisa."

But she handles more murder cases than any other judge, more than 100 a year, easing court overcrowding in a city that records in excess of 400 killings every year.

She hears the horrendous details of the murders of drug dealers, teens, children, spouses — shot, hacked, bludgeoned, strangled, suffocated, tortured — all the ingenious and terrible ways

to end somebody's life.

She listens, and sometimes, as a devout Catholic, asks herself, "What would Jesus do?"

Richette, 69, has been on the homicide bench for the last 15 of her 29 years as a judge.

And she's been criticized harshly for many of her decisions, among them the 1990 probationary sentence she gave Francis Scullin, the white youth who threw a tire iron that killed a 15-year-old Latino boy, and the freeing in 1993 of Joseph Kraft, 83, whose Cadillac rammed another car and incinerated three people.

Kraft's lawyer, F. Emmett Fitzpatrick, said at the time, "I've seen blowout artists, and she isn't even close. She has common sense, and she knows the law. More important, she's a student of humanity."

In an era in which lock-'em-up is the keynote of the country's criminal justice philosophy, Richette may be an anachronism, but few think she's going to change her ways. ■



**Voodoo Justice**

# blame on victim

strong."

Strong enough to convince the judge. Stevens left the court a free man.

"Thank you, judge," Stevens told Richette, his voice quivering as he cried. The sickly Stevens, who wears a brace on his leg, could barely stand.

Stevens is out on bail until his February sentencing. He faces 8½ to 16½ years in prison, but those close to the case doubt he will serve much, if any, jail time.

His lawyer, Janice Smarro, said the judge did the right thing.



Stevens

"He's in bad shape," she said. "He was afraid. He truly believed this was happening."

But friends and relatives of Eno Bailey, the slain mother of four, cried angrily in court.

"They don't feel justice was done," said Assistant District Attorney Sheila Woods-Skipper. "They think it was a sympathy verdict because of his age and health."

During the two-day trial, Stevens told the judge he lived in daily terror.

Bailey, he said, threatened him for several years, torturing him with evil spells.

She told him she would fix him, he said, just like she fixed her ex-boyfriend and his girlfriend with black magic.

The ex-boyfriend died of an asthma attack and his girlfriend of cancer. Stevens believed Bailey was behind the deaths.

Stevens wanted desperately to get the dark spell off him. He went to an occult store and bought candles that he burned to ward off the evil.

Bailey, he said, took trips to Mexico and Cuba to buy the roots for powerful spells.

The prosecution called Stevens' tale of terror nonsense.

Prosecutor Woods-Skipper said Bailey, 62, never had the telltale signs of voodoo practice in her house, like the altars with candles or dolls with pins.

Instead, Woods-Skipper portrayed Stevens as a cold-blooded murderer who pulled the trigger of his .38 to kill.

She said Stevens, Bailey and her son, Albert, had been arguing in the couple's home on Allison Street near Regent in South Philadelphia on Sept. 30, 1995, when the shooting occurred.

"The defendant sees Albert and tells him to get out, that he's tired of him bringing that voodoo stuff in the house," Woods-Skipper said.

The two men argued and Bailey intervened.

Stevens then went to his bedroom and fetched his gun. He returned and fired.



STEVEN M. FALK/ DAILY NEWS

After testifying, Voodoo priest Ricardo Fresses and Angela Novanyon Idizol, a grand voodoo priestess, chat outside courtroom

Bailey collapsed on the floor.

"At the time he shot her, she hadn't threatened him or done anything that amounted to a threat," Woods-Skipper said.

Before announcing her verdict, Richette on her own summoned two experts to testify about voodoo and Santeria, African-based religions that mix aspects of Catholicism with ancient African rituals brought to the New World by slaves.

Angela Novanyon Idizol, a grand voodoo priestess, or gro mambo, softly explained how believers will do anything to rid themselves of evil spells.

She told the court she gets about 30 cases a year of people trying to ward off bad spells.

"They know within their bodies, they know something has changed," she said.

Fresses, the priest, and Idizol said they've had cases of people beating or divorcing those they think are doing ju-ju. But they said they had never seen a murder because of it.

"The majority of the people are too scared to kill," Fresses said. "They just want you to send it back. They say, 'Get it off me.'" ■

**A mixture of beliefs**

by Marisol Bello

Daily News Staff Writer

Incense fills the sanctuary.

Candles burn in the name of the seven African powers.

Believers beat drums and chant songs. In the center, the high priest sacrifices goats and chickens.

It is all part of an elaborate voodoo ceremony to give thanks to the spirits or cast off evil.

For followers, it is a powerful force. Voodoo is an elaborate religion that mixes aspects of Catholicism with ancient African rituals brought to Haiti by slaves.

It has variations throughout the Caribbean, South America and the United States.

African-Americans in the Deep South have a form they call roots. In Jamaica, they practice Obia. Cubans, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans practice Santeria. Brazilians call it candomble.

The religions all are rooted in the same history.

Africans hauled to the New World as slaves brought their own religion, based on seven powerful African spirits that ruled heaven and earth.

When the Europeans tried to force the slaves into Catholicism, the slaves disguised their gods as saints. For example, in the Dominican Republic, a spirit named *Candelo Sedije* is represented by the figure of Saint Michael. Believers in santeria pray to Saint Michael when they want to find love or keep their enemies at bay.

"We believe in God," said Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol, a grand voodoo priestess. "We believe in Christ. And we believe in spiritual forces."

The faithful worship with song and prayer. They often go into trance-like dances to call the deities.

They sacrifice goats, chickens or other animals intended for human consumption as gifts for the saints. ■

**'It can affect the mind . . . voodoo is very strong.'**

# City & Region

MONDAY, MAY 1, 2000

## A day to celebrate African faiths

The Ceremony of Ceremonies was the finale of a four-day conference in honor of the continent's religions.

By Thom Guarnieri  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Nearly 100 people — most clothed in white and many barefooted — moved rhythmically to the singing and pounding drums.

They stepped back and forth in a broad semicircle before the altar decorated with *govis*, icons to the major universal forces.

"Thank God for creating this day and letting us get up and see it," prayed Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol, a voodoo high priestess. "Once this beautiful day is over, we'll understand the true

meaning of unity."

The priestess and the faithful had gathered yesterday for the Ceremony of Ceremonies, the finale to a four-day conference sponsored by the African National Religious Congress.

The event drew representatives of several African faiths and their followers to the Liacouras Center at Temple University, where they worshiped from mid-afternoon to the evening.

Elders from churches around the world were introduced and sat to one side to watch and, one at a time, to offer prayers.

The Rev. Millicent Russell, a priestess of the Obatala Yuruba religion, watched the ritual and the interaction between priests, priestesses and celebrants.

"It's our roots," said Ms. Russell of Lansdowne. "It's like going back to basics, but many people don't even know about it."

"Our religion is not well understood by the public," added Patricia Huff of Philadelphia.

The altar around which the participants sang and danced contained seven small, mushroom-shaped fabric statues, called *govis*. Each represented one of the major *loa*, or divine forces.

While African religions worship a single god, explained George Ware, president of the Congress and a priest with Le Peristyle Haitian Sanctuary, the god manifests itself through many *loas*.

"It appeals to forces in our daily lives," he said, "to help us find solutions." He likened it to a guardian angel in other religions.

Ware said the *govis* on the altar yesterday included *Dambala*, which represented peace, *Erusile Freeda*, which represented love, *Ogun*, which was for faith, and *Mililouise*, which invoked destiny. These are the Haitian Creole names, he explained. They would be called something else in African religions.

Samuel Foley, a lawyer and member of the Congress who is training to be a priest, said "the forces are invoked through song and dancing."

One of the major accomplishments since the first conference of the African Religion Congress last year, said Ware, was the creation of a directory of all the priests and priestesses of the African diaspora.

Churches represented yesterday included Candomble from Brazil, Voodoo from Haiti, Santeria from Cuba, Yoruba/Ifi from Nigeria, and Orisa Tradition from Trinidad-Tobago.

The conference leading to yesterday's ceremonies touched on topics such as the concept of god in African ethno-biology and African American Women's healing traditions.



REBECCA BARGER-TUVIM / Inquirer Staff Photographer

**Bowing before an altar** are (from left) voodoo High Priestess Gro Mambo Satela, Grand Priestess Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol, and Papa Yatonde, all of Philadelphia. The ceremony was held at Temple University.

Thom Guarnieri's e-mail address is [tguarnieri@phillynews.com](mailto:tguarnieri@phillynews.com)



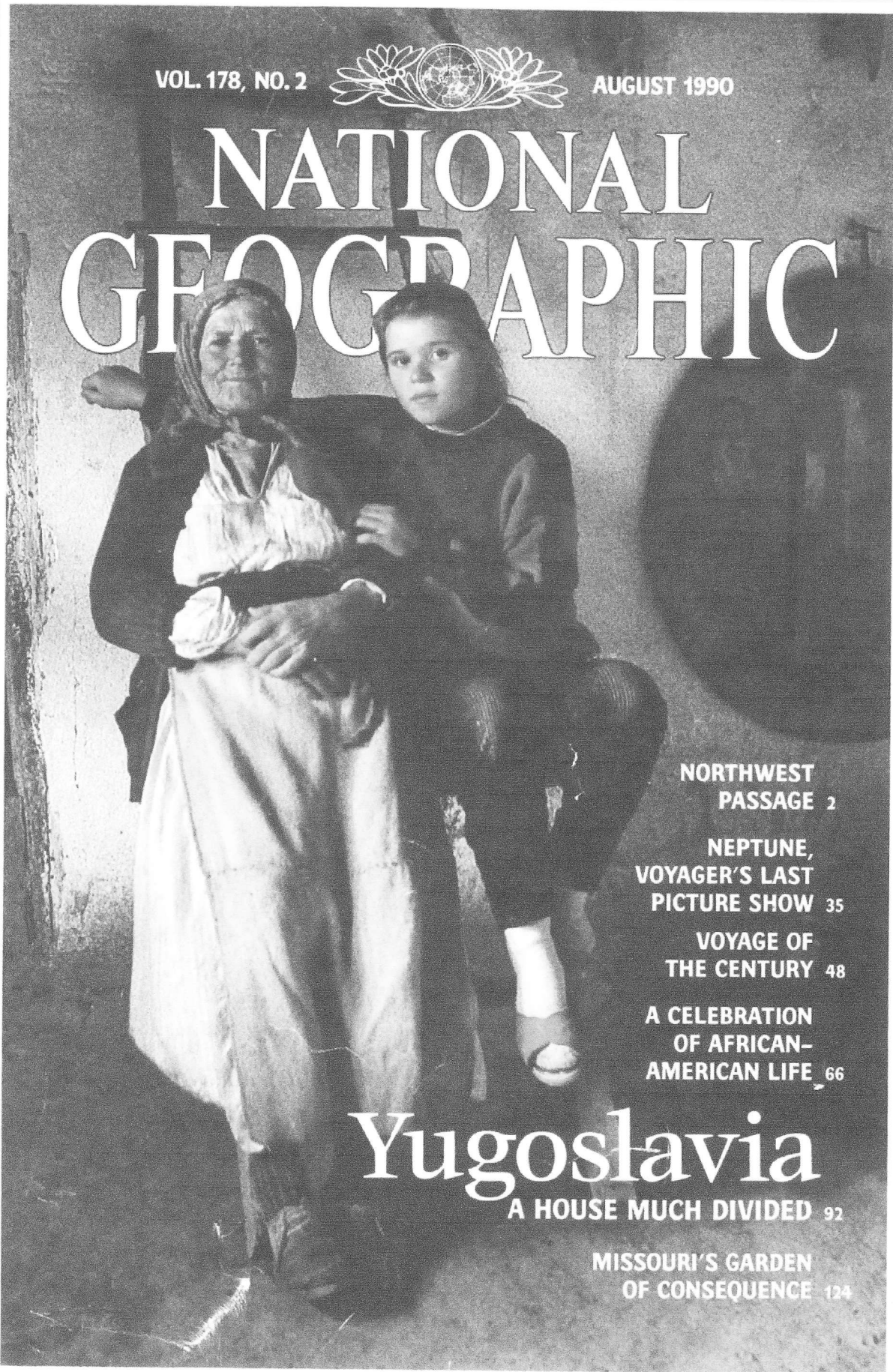
SPECIAL DOUBLE SUPPLEMENT: THE SOLAR SYSTEM

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AUGUST 1990

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*"In my own religious upbringing I saw a lot of altars from different faiths. I was impressed that this one was so elaborate and large — it took up a third of the living-room floor space."*

In celebration of her eighth anniversary as a high priestess of Haitian voodoo, Mambo Angèla Novanyòn Idizol erected a seven-day altar in her home with

offerings of honey, cakes, fruit, and champagne to honor loa, or saints, of her religion. These offerings will be presented to followers during services. A blending of beliefs and rites of African origin, mixed with some

Roman Catholic practices, voodoo is attracting growing numbers of African American intellectuals who are searching for something more in tune with their ethos.



# African religions saluted

Ceremony marks end of Temple conference

by Ron Goldwyn

Daily News Staff Writer

The line between spectator and participant got blurry yesterday in the "World Ceremony of Ceremonies" for Voodoo and other African-based religions at Temple University's Liacouras Center.

Almost all of the 150-plus attendees got out of their comfy seats and moved to the cement arena floor at the call of a high priestess.

They swayed, clapped and spun to drum rhythms and paid homage to the priests, priestesses, chiefs and elders who led the program.

Dr. Leonard Norman Primiano, who brought seven students from his religious folklife class at Cabrini College, found himself in the piercing gaze of a Santeria priest.

Primiano, who had presented

See **RELIGIONS** Next Page



DAVID MAIALETTI/ DAILY NEWS

Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol, center, high priestess of Philadelphia's Haitian PeriStyle Sanctuary, joins in ceremony with two other participants during African Religion Unity Conference she helped organize at Temple University

## RELIGIONS

Continued from Preceding Page

an academic paper Saturday at the African Religion Unity Conference, was being saluted, via translator, for his support of African-based religions.

Moments earlier the priest, in colorful red and white satin, had danced through the crowd in the arm-flinging jerky gestures that practitioners call "possession."

Alternately dancing and videotaping was Richard Yonbue Tanco, a New York City school counselor and psychologist. Instead of applauding, he sounded a purring-clicking he'd learned in Africa.

Tanco, with graying dreadlocks and the loose all-white garments favored by most attendees, said he does not practice a particular African religion. But he sees it as an important link to his identity and considers the priests as role models.

"You would need a family doctor, a [Catholic] priest, a psychiatrist and a social worker to come close to matching a priest of African religion," he said.

Alice Wright, deputy executive director of Gov. Ridge's Advisory Commission on African American Affairs, said she had come to find out more as both a factfinder and, to some extent, as an unaffiliated religious seeker.

"I've learned that a lot of the African-American-based Christian churches, although they follow the Bible, have a lot of traditions that come from African traditions," she said.

She also learned, she said, "there's a fallacy about Voodoo; it's not spooky and it's not evil."

The long ceremony mixed Yoruba-Ifa from Nigeria, Orisa

from Trinidad and Tobago, Candomble from Brazil, plus Haitian Voodoo and Caribbean Santeria.

At times it resembled an electric slide as more than 100 persons danced in union near a half-dozen drummers and a Voodoo shrine with fruits, drinks and seven colorful symbols of the loa, or aspects of God's spirit.

Chanting Creole and periodically changing dress to represent different possessions was conference organizer Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol, high priestess of Philadelphia's Haitian PeriStyle Sanctuary.

She and George Ware preside over the National African Religion Congress from a Fern Rock rowhouse that serves as a Voodoo sanctuary.

Unity and legitimacy for African-based religions was the theme of the four-day conference. That proved hard even in getting delegates. Ware said virtually all the 82 Nigerians, 30 Brazilians and 20 Cubans who planned to attend were barred by U.S. immigration authorities.

But unity was sounded by Okomfo Panyin Nana Korantemaa Ayeboafu of Philadelphia.

"Yes it is time to be one, to put away our differences, to show that we can heal ourselves and the world," she said, bowing toward the elders. "Oh God is wonderful. All the many names we call to represent God we call them today and know your petitions are being heard."

Bruce Murray, a therapist from Mount Airy, said he has been "studying what we [whites] were trying to destroy in slavery." Swaying to the drums, Murray said he found dignity and legitimacy in religions that date back 5,000 years and have survived. ■



DAVID MAIALETTI/ DAILY NEWS

The line between spectators and participants blurred during 'World Ceremony of Ceremonies'

Send e-mail to [goldwyn@phillynews.com](mailto:goldwyn@phillynews.com)

# Rooted in ancestry

## African-based religions attracting U.S. followers

By MARYCLAIRE DALE  
Associated Press Writer

PHILADELPHIA — Voodoo, Santeria and other religions with African roots are drawing followers in the United States among immigrants and black Americans interested in their ancestry, their leaders say.

But their practice can result in clashes with neighbors and police over rituals such as animal sacrifices and sacred drumming — especially since they're mostly conducted at home, in residential neighborhoods.

"This is a country founded on freedom of religion," said George Ware, an organizer with the National African Religion Congress. The group, formed five years ago, has members from a half-dozen religious groups and is meeting this week in its home base in Philadelphia.

"They (mainstream religions) are all given room and space to function within this country, and we are asking for the same," Ware said.

When voodoo practitioners held an annual ceremony honoring their ancestral spirits at midnight, neighbors in a sedate section of Philadelphia called police as drumming started.

"We are not happy about the noise, because we don't want to disturb the neighborhood," Ware said. But "we have a spiritual obligation to continue."

Police and neighbors decided to tolerate the noise. But citations over noise ordinances and animal sacrifices have sometimes landed in court, at least once reaching the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1993, the high court outlawed a Hialeah, Fla., ordinance banning "ritual animal sacrifice," saying its language violated the First Amendment's religious freedom clause because it only applied to the religious slaughter of animals.

"Noise ordinances tend to be generally upheld, because they apply to any kind of noise, from loud speakers to advertising vehicles on streets to rock music to religious celebrations," said Mark Rahdert, a Constitutional law professor at Temple University.

African religions are also grappling with some of the same issues that divide their mainstream counterparts, such as homosexuality.

"I have had a couple — two men who were legally married — and they came to me for marriage counseling," said Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol, chairwoman of the congress. "What do you do?"

The couple's religion does not approve of homosexual behavior or gay marriage, she said.

About 3,000 people from the United States, 17 African countries or countries in which African religions have gained a foothold, are expected at the conference.

The groups are creating religious texts from the spiritual stories that



Chief Babalawo Adelyela Adelekan from Nigeria, holds his Ikih-Ifa, or staff of position, as he questions a speaker's position during the National African Religion Congress conference in Philadelphia Friday. Though many people think of voodoo and other African-based religions as fringe groups, NARC leaders say their numbers in the United States are growing.



Drums used in religious rituals are placed to the side of a room during a meeting at the National African Religion Congress Conference in Philadelphia on Friday.

have been passed down orally in nonliterate societies. And, Ware said, they are building relations with neighbors and police.

"We are making progress," he said.

"Today if people call and complain about our organization, the police explain to them that we are only organizing our right to practice religion."

Jacqueline Larma Photos/The Associated Press



## Faith Life

# African religions eye licensing

A Philadelphia advocacy group is working to get health insurers to recognize Voodoo, Santeria and other practices.

**Kristin E. Holmes**  
is an Inquirer staff writer

**A** core of U.S.-based priests and priestesses of Haitian Voodoo and other ancient African religions gathered around a table in Philadelphia last weekend to study age-old methods of the healing arts.

They also had a more modern goal in mind: to gain licensing from state regulators so primary-care physicians might one day refer patients to them for insurance-covered treatment.

Their advocacy group, the National African Religion Congress, based in Philadelphia, is taking early steps toward gaining recognition from state licensing agencies and insurance providers. It cites the example of acupuncture and massage therapy, many of whose practitioners are certified as alternative-medicine providers.

The healing arts are a staple of Santeria, Haitian Voodoo, Ifa/Yoruba and other faiths, whose clergy administer treatments of herbs, powders, leaves and barks, prescribe "spiritual" baths, and conduct healing rituals.

"We are not trying to replace medical providers, but there are some things we can do," said Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon idizol of Fern Rock, a Haitian Voodoo priestess who is founder and chairwoman of the religion congress.

The hope, she said, is to have patients referred for treatment for a range of maladies including headaches, tension, anxiety and high blood pressure.

Novanyon's group certifies priests and priestesses after a training period of seven to 10 years.

Gaining recognition from regulators is an ambitious goal for faith traditions that are often regarded as marginal and cultish. But the organization, which represents practitioners of five religions in 17 countries, moved in that direction last weekend with its first continuing-education seminar.

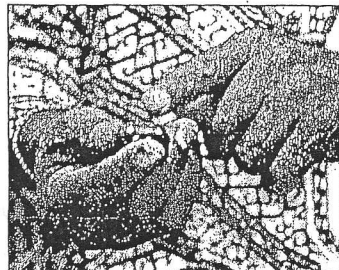
The two-day workshop at its Logan headquarters included instruction by Baba Adebayo Ogunrinu Ogundijo, a Yoruba priest who is a professor at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

About 17 priests and priestesses from New York, Philadelphia and New Jersey attended, and gained 50 continuing-education credits from the religion congress in complementary and alternative-health practices. The topics covered included spiritual medicines, divination (methods of diagnosis), and sacrifices, which can



JOHN COSTELLO / Inquirer Staff Photographer

Discussing divination at the African religion workshop in Philadelphia are (at table, from left) Hungan Kontanavi Elever, Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon idizol, and Chief Adebayo Adebajo. Seated behind them is Gro Mambo Satela Noranyon idizol. The participants want their methods recognized for treating maladies such as headache, anxiety and high blood pressure.



**Palm seeds are used** in rites as shown by Baba Adebayo Ogunrinu Ogundijo, a Yoruba priest and Nigerian professor.

include counsel on giving up specific behaviors or making animal sacrifices.

"If you take castor oil, that comes from a plant, or wild cherry cough syrup uses wild cherry bark," said Iyalosha Omomola Iyabunmi of University City, a Yoruba priestess and founder of the Women's Sekere Ensemble, a percussion group that preserves African music. "We have been using herbs for thousands of years to cure people of their illnesses."

So far, studies on African-based healing practices have been limited to social-science research about the role of the healer, and patients' own reports on recovery and healing, said Marc Micozzi, director of Thomas Jefferson University Hospital's Policy Institute for Integrative Medicine. No

laboratory trials have been conducted to test the effectiveness of treatment, he said.

To be considered an eligible provider by Aetna Inc., one must already be licensed by a governmental agency and have the service one provides be recognized as beneficial by medical experts in that field, said Don Liss, senior medical director of Aetna's Mid-Atlantic region, based in King of Prussia.

Alternative practices such as acupuncture are covered in narrow circumstances, Liss said.

Independence Blue Cross, another major insurer, offers clients access to alternative-care providers listed by the American Specialty Health Networks. George DeVries, the health networks' chief executive officer, said providers such as acupuncturists, dieticians and massage therapists are listed as long as they are licensed, undergo site visits, and have malpractice insurance.

Novanyon and her group are on a mission to bring respect to African-based religions. George Ware, spokesman for the religion congress, said the traditions frequently prompt "that Mantan Moreland look," referring to the wide-eyed surprise that was a trademark of the African American actor who portrayed Charlie Chan's sidekick in 1940s films.

Ware said priests and priestesses,

who set up sanctuaries in their homes, are frequently the target of police and other officials for alleged violation of noise ordinances (rituals often involve dancing and drumming) and animal-cruelty regulations (rituals sometimes involve animal sacrifices).

Novanyon, born Jocelya Smith, founded the National African Religion Congress in 1999 as a governing agency to bring structure and a standardization of practice to African-based religions. The group claims 4,500 members, about 500 in the tristate area.

Last weekend, priests and priestesses including a lawyer and a physician sat listening to Ogundijo.

Ogundijo discussed divination, the process of "reading" or assessing the physical, mental and emotional state of a person who has come to a priest or priestess for help. The approach can lead to counseling on a variety of issues, including financial well-being and professional careers.

Ogundijo held up an Opele chain, a divination tool that he uses. The chain of cowrie shells and stones is thrown and interpreted according to how it lands.

"We are not a group of backward people who have grasped onto something because we are lacking something else," said priestess Octavia Danielson.

Contact Kristin E. Holmes at 215-854-2791 or kholmes@phillynews.com.

## Lawsuit attacks TV show 'voodoo'

By Jennifer Smith  
Tribune Staff Writer

The National African Religion Congress (NARC) filed a lawsuit Monday against Universal Studios Inc., USA Cable Entertainment, LLC, and House of Eleven Productions, Inc., saying that the SciFi Channel's upcoming reality series "Mad Mad House" degrades African-based religions through stereotypical and misleading images.

NARC, which is headquartered in Philadelphia, said the depiction of "Ta' Shia the Voodoo Priestess" is just one of many falsities surrounding the religion.

"Hollywood has taken liberties with the word 'voodoo' for so long that we have reached a point where the producers of a television show feel that they can call anything they like

'voodoo' and get away with it," said George Ware, NARC president, in a press conference Tuesday.

Ware and other members referred to a brief advertisement for the show where contestants are covered in animal parts, and a voiceover states that the priestess "always wanted to include you in her religion not by having a prayer group, but by burying you in animal parts," among their issues of concern. NARC members also said the show "falsely promotes a Yemoja priestess of the Ifa/Yoruba faith as a priestess of the Voodoo religion" in a press release.

NARC said that Iya Ta' Shia Asanti, who portrays herself on "Mad Mad House," declined to comment on the situation. The group also said that Asanti is not registered among their 5,000-plus members and constituents from 17 countries that follow

guidelines established by the organization. Its four-point mission includes maintaining organizational structure in which spiritual houses, priests, priestesses, babalawos and interested associates may be represented through formal affiliation; creating a registry and system of certification for practicing priests and priestesses; establishing freedom of religious practice and to fight persecution of African-based religions; and preserving tradition and providing guidance and correct education for practitioners, priests, priestesses and the general public.

NARC members believe the show depicts both the Voodoo and Yoruba religions incorrectly. They cite a photo on the show's Web site where Ta' Shia holds a tray containing shells, and said

### Voodoo From Page 6-D

that the tray and shells are not supposed to touch one another because of religious mandates. There are also photos on the site that show Ta' Shia surrounded by certain candles, statues, dolls, beads and other objects that they say are not affiliated with the practice of Voodoo.

"The congress is not here to attack the priestess. We're not here to tear her down or try to make her look bad. But, we are here to stop the problem that the Voodoo religion has been having for years," said NARC Chairperson Gro Mambo Angéla Noványón Idizol. Idizol said she was also approached last year by the Sci-

Fi Channel about doing the show, and was under the impression that the series would clear up stereotypes associated with the religion. She said she declined to sign a final contract following being "possessed on" during a gathering where a religious guide told her the program would not portray what had been outlined to her by producers.

"Mad Mad House" is scheduled to air on the SciFi Channel starting March 4. According to recent promotions, the six-week series will include "10 everyday people" who live in a house run by "practitioners of alternative lifestyles." Others in addition to Ta' Shia include a vampire, a Wiccan, a naturist and a modern primitive.

See **Voodoo** — Page 5



## Recognition And Decrees

**2000 — Present**

Mayor Buddy Dyer, City of Orlando  
Mayor John F. Street, City of Philadelphia  
Governor Edward G. Rendell, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
State Senator Anthony Hardy Williams, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Congressman Chaka Fattah, Congress of the United States  
Governor Tom Ridge, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Senator Arlen Specter, United States Senate



THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS  
PROCLAMATION

BE IT KNOWN THAT MARC H. MORIAL, MAYOR OF NEW ORLEANS HAS THIS DAY

PROCLAIMED

*June 6, 1998*

TO BE

*"New Orleans Voodoo Festival Day"*

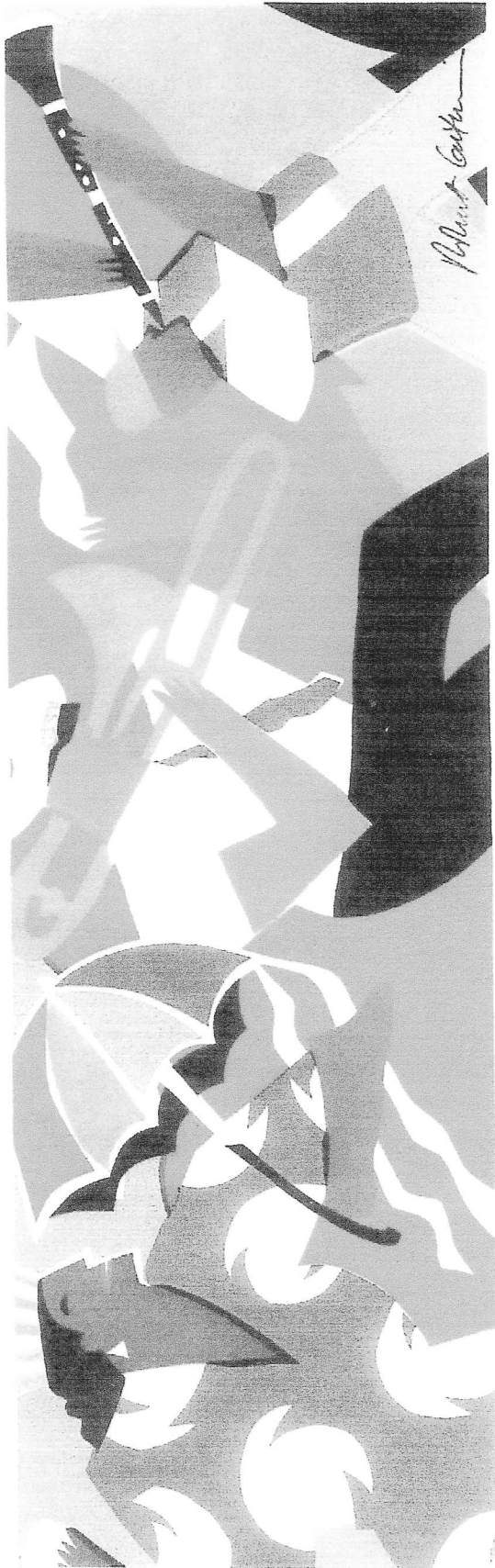
IN NEW ORLEANS

*Marc Morial*

MAYOR

ATTESTED TO, THIS *6<sup>th</sup>* DAY OF *June* 19 *98*





THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS  
PROCLAMATION

BE IT KNOWN THAT MARC H. MORIAL, MAYOR OF NEW ORLEANS HAS THIS DAY

PROCLAIMED

June 6, 1999

TO BE

"New Orleans Voodoo Festival Day"<sup>22</sup>

IN NEW ORLEANS

Marc Morial

MAYOR

ATTESTED TO, THIS 6<sup>th</sup> DAY OF June 1999





THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

BE IT KNOWN THAT MARC H. MORIAL, MAYOR OF NEW ORLEANS HAS CONFERRED

THE TITLE OF

HONORARY CITIZEN

UPON

*Ciro Mambro Angela Noranynon, Mizol*

*Marc H. Morial*  
MAYOR

ATTESTED TO, THIS *9<sup>th</sup>* DAY OF *May*, 1999







COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

**GREETINGS:**

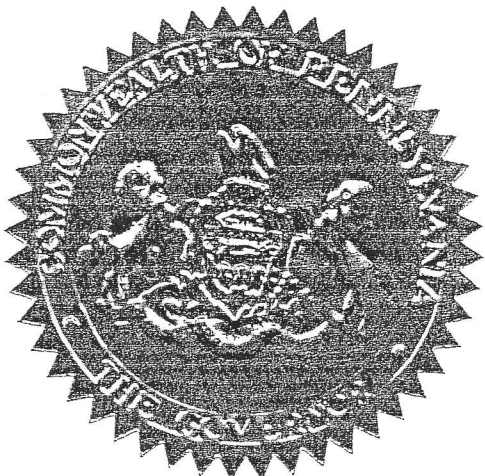
It gives me great pleasure to extend my personal regards and heartfelt welcome to everyone gathered for the Annual African Religion Unity Conference and Ceremony of Ceremonies in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

More than three centuries ago, when William Penn founded Pennsylvania, he created a society built on the ideas of community, individual freedom, and religious diversity. The site of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth place of the United States Constitution, our Commonwealth embodies the principles that founded, guided and progressed this nation for more than two centuries. As a Commonwealth, Pennsylvania cherishes the historical, social and cultural arts of our people and communities as emblems of enduring significance and influential character to the entire nation and to the world.

As the spiritual leaders of our global nations, you have all worked with enduring vigilance to promote the ideals of community and the principles of faith, unity and humanitarian service. Though our global and local communities reflect a rich diversity of denominations, you gather today to celebrate the traditions of a unified message. Thanks to your leadership and vision, citizens of our Commonwealth, our nation and our world will continue to pursue a life filled with spiritual fulfillment, limitless opportunity and hope.

As Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I am always pleased to commend efforts that reflect a commitment to global peace through our families, our communities and our Commonwealth. Congratulations to the National African Religion Congress for your important contributions to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and to the world.

On behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I extend my best wishes for an enjoyable and ultimately successful conference.



*Tom Ridge*  
TOM RIDGE  
April 2000



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

**GREETINGS:**

It gives me great pleasure to extend my personal regards and heartfelt welcome to everyone gathered for the Third Annual African Religion Unity Conference and Ceremony of Ceremonies in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

More than three centuries ago, when William Penn founded Pennsylvania, he created a society built on the ideas of community, individual freedom, and religious diversity. The site of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth place of the United States Constitution, our Commonwealth embodies the principles that founded, guided and progressed this nation for more than two centuries. As a Commonwealth, Pennsylvania cherishes the historical, social and cultural arts of our people and communities as emblems of enduring significance and influential character to the entire nation and to the world.

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On behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I extend my best wishes for an enjoyable and ultimately successful conference.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Ridge".

TOM RIDGE  
July 2001

ROBERT A. BRADY  
1ST DISTRICT, PENNSYLVANIA

COMMITTEES:  
NATIONAL SECURITY  
SMALL BUSINESS

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-3801

- 218 CANNON BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3801  
(202) 225 4731  
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- 1510 W. CECIL B. MOORE AVENUE  
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- THE COLONY BUILDING  
511-13 WELSH STREET  
1ST FLOOR  
CHESTER, PA 19013  
(610) 874-7094
- 1907 SOUTH BROAD STREET  
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19148  
(215) 389-4627  
FAX: (215) 389-4636

June 14, 2001

George Ware  
President  
National African Religion Congress  
5629 North Warnock Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19141

Dear Mr. Ware:

I am most honored to have this opportunity to congratulate and salute the National African Religion Congress (NARC) and its membership from around the world on this the celebration of the Third Annual African Religion Unity Conference and Ceremony of Ceremonies. What phenomenal tenacity and perseverance you have displayed on the road to this third unity conference.

There is nothing more gratifying, strengthening or empowering than to have ones dream materialize into fruition. Your steadfastness in unifying the religions of the African diaspora into this annual sacred celebration is most commendable. You have remained undaunted in the face of adversity and challenge and continue to forge forward.

I applaud NARC, its achievements and its goals. May you continue moving forward positively, encouraging minds and elevating spirits along the way.

Sincerely,



ROBERT A. BRADY  
Member of Congress



# CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
ROOM 215 CITY HALL  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19107-3295  
(215) 686-2181  
FAX (215) 686-2180

JOHN F. STREET, ESQUIRE  
MAYOR

June 15, 2001

Gro Hungan Yabofe Novanyon Idizol  
National African Religion Congress  
5629 North Warnock Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19141

Greetings!

It is my pleasure to welcome to Philadelphia all those attending the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual African Religion World Conference and Ceremony of Ceremonies. Philadelphia is a great city and I am happy that you chose this location for your Convention. This is the historic seat of liberty and American independence. Our city has a rich cultural heritage, ethnic diversity and a constitutional legacy. We have strong neighborhoods, great sports teams, entertainment and eating establishments. While you are here I hope you will have the opportunity to take advantage of all that we have to offer.

Your Convention is set to accomplish much yet the goals you have set are within your reach. In today's world, where the order of the day is compromise, it is important that you dare to be different. Stand faithful to your commitment. Be consistent and focused. Keep a clear vision of where you are leading the people and above all else, be dedicated to your purpose. In doing so, you will fulfill your organization's purpose that of affirming support for cultural and spiritual diversity.

Best wishes for an enjoyable and productive Convention.

With kind regards, I am



John F. Street, Esquire  
Mayor





## Proclamation

presented to  
**THE NATIONAL AFRICAN RELIGION CONGRESS**

*WHEREAS, it is my pleasure, as Congressman of the Second Congressional District, to congratulate The National African Religion Congress, on the occasion of their 3<sup>rd</sup> "Annual African Religion World Conference", July 19-22, 2001, and*

*WHEREAS, I welcome your organization to the City of Brotherly Love and extend our warmest wishes for a successful conference and hoping your convention can accomplish your goals and your ideals.*

***THEREFORE,** be it resolved that I join with many in extending best wishes for an enjoyable and successful convention.*

*June 25, 2001*  
Date

*Chaka Fattah*

Chaka Fattah  
Member of Congress



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

**GREETINGS:**

It gives me great pleasure to extend my personal regards and heartfelt welcome to everyone gathered for the Fourth Annual African Religion Conference and World Ceremony of Ceremonies at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

More than three centuries ago, when William Penn founded Pennsylvania, he created a society built on the ideas of community, individual freedom, and religious diversity. The site of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth place of the United States Constitution, our Commonwealth embodies the principles that founded, guided and progressed this nation for more than two centuries. As a Commonwealth, Pennsylvania cherishes the historical, social and cultural arts of our people and communities as emblems of enduring significance and influential character to the entire nation and to the world.

As the spiritual leaders of our global nations, you have all worked with enduring vigilance to promote the ideals of community and the principles of faith, unity and humanitarian service. Though our global and local communities reflect a rich diversity of denominations, you gather today to celebrate the traditions of a unified message. Thanks to your leadership and vision, citizens of our Commonwealth, our nation and our world will continue to pursue a life filled with spiritual fulfillment, limitless opportunity and hope.

As Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I am always pleased to commend efforts that reflect a commitment to global peace through our families, our communities and our Commonwealth. Congratulations to the National African Religion Congress for your important contributions to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and to the world.

On behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I extend my best wishes for an enjoyable and ultimately successful conference.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Ridge".

TOM RIDGE  
August 1, 2002



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

**GREETINGS:**

It gives me great pleasure to extend my personal regards and heartfelt welcome to everyone gathered for the Fourth Annual African Religion Conference and Ceremony of Ceremonies at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, in historic Philadelphia.

More than three centuries ago, when William Penn founded Pennsylvania, he created a society built on the ideas of community, individual freedom, and religious diversity. The site of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth place of the United States Constitution, our Commonwealth embodies the principles that founded, guided and progressed this nation for more than two centuries. As a Commonwealth, Pennsylvania cherishes the historical, social and cultural arts of our people and communities as emblems of enduring significance and influential character to the entire nation and to the world.

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As Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I am always pleased to commend efforts that reflect a commitment to global peace through our families, our communities and our Commonwealth. Congratulations to the National African Religion Congress for your important contributions to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and to the world.

On behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I extend my best wishes for an enjoyable and ultimately successful conference.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark Schweiker".

MARK SCHWEIKER  
August 1, 2002





## Proclamation

presented to

# *The National African Religion Congress*

*WHEREAS, it is my pleasure as Congressman of the Second Congressional District, to congratulate you on the occasion of your 5<sup>th</sup> Annual African Religion World Conference, which will be held in Philadelphia, August 7-10, 2003, and*

*WHEREAS, I welcome your organization to the City of Brotherly Love and extend my warmest wishes for a successful conference and hoping your convention can accomplish all your goals and your ideas, and*

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that I join with many in extending best wishes for an enjoyable and successful convention.

*9/5/03*

Date

*Chaka Fattah*

Chaka Fattah

Member of Congress





COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

**GREETINGS:**

I am pleased to extend personal regards and a heartfelt welcome to everyone gathered for the Fifth Annual African Religion Conference and Ceremony of Ceremonies at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, in historic Philadelphia.

More than three centuries ago, William Penn created a society built on the ideas of community, individual freedom, and religious diversity. The site of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth place of the United States Constitution, our Commonwealth embodies the principles that founded, guided and progressed this nation for more than two centuries. As a Commonwealth, Pennsylvania cherishes the historical, social and cultural arts of our people and communities as emblems of enduring significance and influential character to the entire nation and to the world.

As the spiritual leaders of our global nations, you have worked with enduring vigilance to promote the ideals of community and the principles of faith, unity and humanitarian service. Though our global and local communities reflect a rich diversity of denominations, you gather today to celebrate the traditions of a unified message. Thanks to your leadership and vision, citizens of our Commonwealth, our nation and our world will continue to pursue a life filled with spiritual fulfillment, limitless opportunity and hope.

On behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I extend best wishes for an enjoyable and ultimately successful conference.

*Edward G. Rendell*

EDWARD G. RENDELL  
Governor  
August 2003



# CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

## Proclamation

Philadelphia, a City of diverse religious and ethnic pride, has long sought harmony and fellowship among its citizens. Following in the spirit of William Penn, who founded the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia in 1682 on the basis of religious tolerance, the National African Religion Congress has convened the national and international leaders of African religions representing 13 countries and six religions.

Cultural and religious lines will merge during the Congress's Annual Religion Unity Conference, which fosters understanding among the various African religions, and among the racially and culturally diverse practitioners. Effective dialogue will be stressed as they come together to inform the public about the beauty and power of African religions and culture.

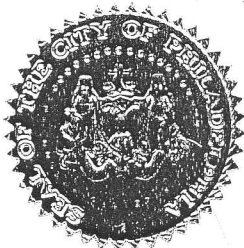
From Monday, August 4 through Sunday, August 10, 2003, the Annual African Religion Unity Conference will be held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center. Traditions from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Haiti, Trinidad/Tobago, Nigeria and Ghana will be represented at the Conference, which will culminate in an ecumenical service of all of the represented religions on August 10.

THEREFORE . . .

I, John F. Street, Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, hereby proclaim the week of Monday, August 4 through Sunday, August 10, 2003 as

### AFRICAN RELIGION NATIONAL UNITY WEEK

in Philadelphia, and urge all citizens to be aware of the rich diversity of denominations as this Conference celebrates the traditions of a unified message.

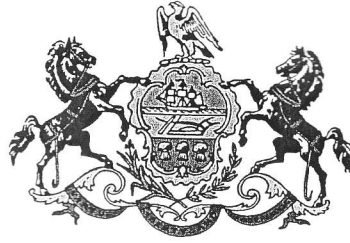


A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Street".

JOHN F. STREET  
Mayor

Given under my hand and the Seal of the City of Philadelphia, this fourth day of August, two thousand and three.

# Senate of Pennsylvania



HARRISBURG, PA

## Congratulations

In the Senate, July 17, 2003

Whereas, The Senate of Pennsylvania is always pleased to recognize those institutions and organizations which, through adherence to the highest of ideals and standards of service, contribute to the well-being of their communities and ultimately to all the citizens of this great Commonwealth; and

Whereas, On August 5, 2003, the National African Religion Congress is celebrating the grand opening of its international headquarters; and

Whereas, The National African Religion Congress comprises a network of more than five thousand religious and cross-cultural institutions throughout the world. The organization also has a diverse membership with clerics of African-based religions, scholars, artisans and dignitaries from Brazil, Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela, England, Canada, Puerto Rico, Africa and forty-eight states of the United States.

Now therefore, the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania heartily congratulates the National African Religion Congress as it celebrates the opening of its new international headquarters; offers best wishes for continued success as it moves toward further thresholds of excellence;

And directs that a copy of this document, sponsored by Senator Anthony Hardy Williams, be transmitted to the National African Religion Congress, 5104 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark R. Corrigan".

Mark R. Corrigan, Secretary



# CITY OF ORLANDO

---

OFFICE OF  
**BUDDY DYER**  
MAYOR

## GREETINGS!

As Mayor of the beautiful City of Orlando, I would like to extend a personal welcome to the members and guests of The National African Religion Congress (NARC), attending the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual African Religion Conference and "Ceremony of Ceremonies". Orlando is proud to have been selected as host city for your event.

For those who are first time visitors, you are soon to discover that Orlando's community is rich with opportunities for recreation, cultural entertainment, educational resources, and business enterprises. You will also discover what many others have already noted -- that is when it comes to service and hospitality, Orlando is second to none.

Again, thank you for visiting our community. I hope you enjoy learning about our city, meeting our people...and plan on visiting us again soon!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Buddy Dyer".

Buddy Dyer  
Mayor