

African American Folk Healing



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Cure a nosebleed by holding a silver quarter on the back of the neck. Treat an earache with sweet oil drops. Wear plant roots to keep from catching colds. Within many African American families, these kinds of practices continue today, woven into the fabric of black culture, often communicated through women. Such folk practices shape the concepts about healing that are diffused throughout African American communities and are expressed in myriad ways, from faith healing to making a mojo. Stephanie Y. Mitchem here presents a fascinating study of African American healing. She sheds light on a variety of folk practices and traces their development from the time of slavery through the Great Migrations, exploring how they have continued into the present and their relationship with alternative medicines. Through conversations with black Americans, she demonstrates how herbs, charms, and rituals continue folk healing performances. Mitchem shows that these practices are not simply about healing; they are linked to expressions of faith, delineating aspects of a holistic epistemology and pointing to disjunctures between African American views of wellness and illness and those of the culture of institutional medicine.

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目录:

[African American Folk Healing_ 下载链接1](#)

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