



# Spirited Things: The Work of "Possession" in Afro-Atlantic Religions

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**Spirited Things: The Work of "Possession" in Afro-Atlantic Religions** From University Of Chicago Press

The word “possession” is anything but transparent, especially as it developed in the context of the African Americas. There it referred variously to spirits, material goods, and people. It served as a watershed term marking both transactions in which people were made into things—via slavery—and ritual events by which the thingification of people was revised. In *Spirited Things*, Paul Christopher Johnson gathers together essays by leading anthropologists in the Americas that reopen the concept of possession on these two fronts in order to examine the relationship between African religions in the Atlantic and the economies that have historically shaped—and continue to shape—the cultures that practice them. Exploring the way spirit possessions were framed both by material things—including plantations, the Catholic church, the sea, and the phonograph—as well as by the legacy of slavery, they offer a powerful new way of understanding the Atlantic world.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

“*Spirited Things* is an ambitious and provocative work that casts a brilliant light over one of the more complex and critical issues in anthropology. It brings spirit possession into the heart of anthropological theory, revealing its central place in the ‘genealogy of modernity.’”

(Stefania Capone, National Center for Scientific Research and School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences)

“A model study, provocative and compelling, a constellation of essays with both gravity and energy, *Spirited Things* rearranges spirit possession’s theoretical and contextual furnishings with striking consequences. Parsing the subject in relation to current scholarly frontiers where matter is reacquainted with spirit and things aspire to agency, Johnson’s volume invites an expansive audience of readers interested in materiality, religion, sensation, transatlantic slavery, and Afro-Atlantic modernities.”

(Sally M. Promey, editor of *Sensational Religion*)

“Trading geographical sweep for ethnographic and theoretical depth, this volume engages the relationship between spirit possession and materiality, helping to locate the place of possession in the genealogy of modernity—an innovative, stimulating take on Black Atlantic religions.”

(Richard Price, author of *First-Time*, *Travels with Tooy*, and *Rainforest Warriors*.)

### **About the Author**

**Paul Christopher Johnson** is professor of history and Afroamerican and African studies and director of the Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He is the author of *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* and *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa*.

## **Users Review**

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#### **Ines Patterson:**

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