

## **Skepticism and Black Beliefs**

**By Norm R. Allen Jr.**

Paranormal and pseudo-scientific beliefs are common throughout the world. Some of these ideas are rooted in culture and/or race. Among Black people, some of these notions have particular appeal.

In Africa, Brazil and other parts of the world, voodoo or juju is practiced. In 1989, Isaiah Oke wrote the book *Blood Secrets*. He claimed to have been the biggest juju priest in Nigeria. He was initiated into the religion at the age of 13. His rites allegedly involved the drinking of blood and ritual murder. The book was published by Prometheus, a leading publisher of books on skepticism and humanism. However, Oke contended that the paranormal events he oversaw and witnessed were real.

The fact is that there is no evidence – other than hearsay evidence – that juju works. For those that disagree, the famed skeptic James Randi is offering \$1 million to anyone that provides evidence to the contrary.

Similarly related to juju is traditional medicine. Yet traditional medicine has been tested and found wanting. If it worked, Africans and others that embrace it would not be in such miserable health and would not have such short life spans. For good health and longer life spans, people need good modern medical care and sound health systems.

AIDS is still a major health concern. In South Africa, there was a widespread belief that AIDS was not caused by HIV. President Thabo Mbeki went so far as to convene a panel to promote this idea. According to a story from the Guardian, this idea led to the deaths of a whopping 30,000 people!  
(<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/nov/26/aids-south-africa>.)

Later, former South African president Nelson Mandela participated on another panel and encouraged scientists and others to make ARV drugs available to South African AIDS sufferers, thus saving many more lives.

Complicating matters are the paranoid AIDS conspiracy theories, such as the notion that AIDS was created by the CIA to kill Black people and Gays. These kinds of ideas only encourage other myths that make it increasingly difficult to combat the scourge.

In the 1990s, the Nation of Islam (NOI) professed to have a cure for AIDS. They were promoting a product called Kemron, or Low-dose Oral Interferon Alpha (sometimes simply called interferon.) The drug was not approved by the Federal Drug Administration. It was deemed both illegal and dangerous.

The NOI proudly claimed that interferon was discovered by two Black physicians in Africa. However, a White veterinarian named Joseph Cummins was the first to use it, not as a cure for AIDS, but simply to relieve the suffering of AIDS patients.

In Kenya, David K. Koech claimed that AIDS had been defeated. However, he had been using improper scientific controls and there was no way of knowing if the patients he examined had been taking other drugs. His findings could not be duplicated and U.S. health experts determined that the drug could not cure AIDS.

The NOI eventually won rights to distribute a brand of interferon called Immunex. They conducted drug tests at their Abundant Life Clinic, but they had no testing experience and none of their findings could be taken seriously.

These kinds of unscientific beliefs surrounding AIDS are downright deadly. Far from focusing only on skepticism of paranormal claims, skepticism must be applied in all areas of human endeavor in efforts to keep harm at bay.

A less dangerous though equally irrational idea is the belief in melaninism. That is the notion that the melanin pigment endows Black people with numerous advantages including athletic, musical and intellectual superiority, rhythm, and even paranormal powers such as clairvoyance and telekinesis. This idea was especially popular among Afrocentrists in the 1980s and 1990s. However, there have never been any data to back up any of these extraordinary claims.

Black comedians such as Richard Pryor and Eddie Griffin have contended that extraterrestrial aliens will not come to the Black community. Griffin even thinks they're racist. Not so fast! According to many UFO buffs, the most "well-

documented” UFO claim is the story of Betty and Barney Hill, an interracial couple from rural New Hampshire. Betty and her Black husband Barney were allegedly abducted by ETs on September 19-20, 1961.

However, skeptics do not believe this extraordinary claim. They point out that it is strange that ETs only abduct people in rural areas. They never land on the White House lawn or actually say “take me to your leader.”

Then there is the story of (surprise!) the Nation of Islam. Minister Louis Farrakhan claims that his long-deceased leader Elijah Muhammad is actually alive and well and living on a Mother Plane that comes equipped with baby planes that engage in warfare with U.S. military planes. After talking about the Mother Plane to one stunned audience, Farrakhan said, “I don’t care if you think I’m a nut.” Well, it’s a good thing he doesn’t care. And so much for the idea that ETs don’t like Black people.

These are just some of the paranormal and unscientific ideas that many Blacks embrace. Some – such as a belief in ghosts or the Dogon mystery and Sirius B— are relatively harmless. (To learn about the Dogon mystery see *The Sirius Mystery* by James Oberg-Robert Sheaffer at [www.debunker.com/texts/dogon.html](http://www.debunker.com/texts/dogon.html). Or visit [www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread326227/pg1](http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread326227/pg1).)

Yet some of these ideas are incredibly dangerous. In any case, embracing a methodology of skeptical inquiry would be in everyone’s best interest, and if applied consistently and in all areas of human endeavor, could spare humankind a great deal of harm, misery and death.