

Conjuring
Harriet
“Mama Moses”
Tubman
and the Spirits
of the Underground Railroad

WITCHDOCTOR UTU

Foreword by Baba “Teddy” Olujimi Jauw



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Introduction

When you think about the Underground Railroad, what images come to mind? Do you see mysterious lanterns illuminating dark forest paths? Do you picture quilts hanging at Quaker homes with codes and clues for the weary freedom seeker? Is it the North Star guiding travelers on a clear night? Do you think of the Underground Railroad's most famous and celebrated conductor, Harriet Tubman? Or perhaps you're familiar with the name but don't really know much beyond that.

The Underground Railroad (or as we abbreviate it in my tradition, the U.G.R.R.) was a series of networks, secret trails, and safe houses that existed in the United States during the early to mid nineteenth century. Funded and supported by abolitionists, it was designed to aid freedom-seeking runaways fleeing slavery. While abolitionists were predominantly white freethinkers, many "free people of color" were also dedicated to the cause. Although most of the routes and tracks of freedom ran north and into Canada—most notably to Ontario—there were also routes that at times ran south into Florida and on to the Caribbean as well as leading west. The height of this clandestine and illegal movement was around 1840–60.

There was truly no "underground" nor any "railroad," at least not in a literal sense. Hidden meaning and code were the norm and necessity for a movement funneling escaped slaves to freedom. The term "underground" applied to its clandestine purpose: it was a secret—albeit the worst one kept eventually—yet still was never compromised as a whole. "Railroad"

described a means to travel, and while there were times actual railroad lines were used, it was not what the term referred to. However, railroad terminology was employed for much of the U.G.R.R. code to describe routes and safe locations: people that helped run the trails were “conductors,” places that were safe to stay were “stations,” runaways were “baggage” and those that housed runaways were “station masters.”

A loosely connected entity of this nature was an expensive one to maintain. There needed to be money for food, clothing, and supplies, as well as to pay for intelligence and at times even bribes. Not that every single person who traveled on the U.G.R.R. was able to benefit from the funded lines to freedom, not even close, but it still took immense support from various abolitionist societies for supplies, news, and awareness to reign. The truth is an overwhelming number of runaways traveled to freedom by themselves, through hostile swamp and marsh, with little support other than their will, their courage, and the love of their ancestors.

It never ceases to amaze me how far ahead of its time the U.G.R.R. was in many ways, that such a network and movement would exist in the 1800s, in a time when institutional slavery was legal in America. That so many men and women of every creed and color would not only stand for what is right, what is just, but would do so at the risk and peril of their livelihood, freedom, and sometimes even their own lives is such a profound, sacred, and inspiring reality. In these modern times we could certainly learn a thing or two from that sort of community that crossed religious, economic, and racial lines. As this book will demonstrate, not only is the U.G.R.R. an inspiring entity to draw from, but so too is the spirit world it frames, a spirit world that uplifts us as we nurture them in reciprocity. In gratitude, hand in hand we can become illuminated, healed, and in turn continue to bring light and reverence to this legacy.

The Americas have a dark history at their foundation. While new nations were built under a pretense of freedom and equality, they were done so by not only displacing the indigenous peoples of the Americas in

genocidal proportions, but also enlisting the horrendous trade of human slavery. The level of cruelty, pain, and suffering of the African slave trade in the Americas set a standard so terrible that to this day it still reverberates. In many ways, North America has not come to terms even now with the horrendous treatment of indigenous peoples nor the brutal enslavement of the Africans. This legacy is something that we continue to strive to heal and solve for in our complex modern society. We cannot be naive to the fact that many of the African traditional religions (ATRs) that have proliferated and become attractive and exotic forms of spirituality to many in North America are a direct product of the will to survive, be free, and maintain dignity in the face of the subhuman treatment of slavery. We cannot drink from the cup of conjure nor read from the bones of rootwork without fully knowing what those legacies stand for and how they had to adapt to institutional genocide, rape, murder, and enslavement. ATRs and spiritual expressions such as vodou, and Santeria, as well as American conjure, hoodoo, and rootwork are all traditions that are based in the struggle against the North American slave trade by those who were in its bondage.

The Underground Railroad was one of those traditions, but one with a slightly different foundation than most ATRs and their spirit worlds. The U.G.R.R. was a movement and fight against slavery engaged in by people of many colors, many classes, and many religions. An entire continent was divided when it came to slavery, and it's safe to say that those who fought for and maintained the U.G.R.R. and all that it stood for were on the right side of history, the just side with regard to human dignity and freedom.

The U.G.R.R. is often misunderstood, and at times romanticized with falsities from white American and Christian narratives. There is not much we can do about that except to shed light upon the truths and realities of what the U.G.R.R. was before we can delve into the actual rich and colorful spirit world it houses. Bear in mind that entire books and volumes have and will continue to be written about the U.G.R.R. in academia, so it's not realistic that this book—a grimoire of conjures and magic housed

within mysteries pertaining to the U.G.R.R.—can be one of them. But we will touch upon many legacies, histories, and realities, as well as the spiritual blood, sweat, and tears behind the movement.

One truth not commonly discussed in the mainstream narrative is that many abolitionists' beliefs were rooted in controversial forms of spirituality or a lack thereof. Notable abolitionists were immersed in mysticism, spiritualism, mesmerism, the occult, and atheism. The fact that so many abolitionists and those that supported the movement were steeped in alternative forms of spirituality is uniquely responsible for practices that are a cross-pollination of Quaker mystics and runaway slaves, of whom many were adherents of conjure and rootwork. The fact that up to 100,000 escapees from slavery traveled north via the U.G.R.R., with their many forms of spirituality including Christianity, voodoo, conjure, and rootwork, and who in turn broke bread and intermingled their practices with some of their Quaker hosts, is an example of the sheer progressive and esoteric nature of the U.G.R.R. Rootwork, mysticism, and animism are all significant parts of the U.G.R.R. The trails and routes of freedom were saturated in magic, spells, and ancestral veneration. The safe houses were breeding grounds of religious fraternity. The means and ways of codes, signals, and terminology that defined the U.G.R.R. were equal parts Christian, Jewish, and African, intermixed into a formidable formula that would challenge a very society built upon injustice and in many ways would contribute to the defeat of the tyranny of slavery. However, over the years, “alternative spirituality”—be it African traditions, Christian mysticism, or combinations of the two—has been left out of the histories as a paramount piece of the wheel that helped the freedom train run.

In the same way, the reality of how many slave revolts and battles for freedom took place—many empowered again by African traditions, Christian mysticism, or the combination of the two—is hidden away in favor of a more romantic and peaceful image of the U.G.R.R. This is not only tragic, but a falsity. The unique collaboration of the U.G.R.R. was not devoid of

blood spilled on its trails—far from it. Many of the white supporters of the U.G.R.R. were radicals who took the lives of slavers and bounty hunters in retribution for their bad acts. As well, many of the enslaved, whether by revolt or in self-defense on the trails of freedom, also spilled a river of blood. The reality of what the U.G.R.R. was remains complex. Yes, kind Quakers hid runaway slaves in their barns and properties. Yes, white men and women of high society funded the movement philanthropically. And yes, many of the runaways and their supporters were God-fearing folk. But it is also true that many traveling on the railroad were fierce warriors and African shamans and many of the white supporters were radical insurrectionists. The safe houses were also places where spirits were invoked, fed, and empowered. The celebrated Harriet Tubman, whom so many recall as a devout Christian of a gentle nature, was at the same time a gun-toting conjure woman, by all accounts not afraid to use her “piece,” whether on slavers, their hounds, or the wavering traveler on her track—one who considered running back to the plantation, thus risking the rest of the group.

I live in St. Catharines in Ontario—the very town where Harriet Tubman brought her particular “track” of the Underground Railroad to its end. Living in St. Catharines a stone’s throw from the very buildings in which she lived, planned, prayed, and made decisions that would change history gives me a unique perspective. The old neighborhood that was once called many things—“colored town,” “free town,” and “little Africa”—still remains, but it’s a ghost of itself these days—with an emphasis on *ghost*. The spirits of many freedom seekers still haunt this area, as well as spirits making spectral pilgrimage to the still standing and functioning house of prayer that Harriet Tubman attended: the British Methodist Episcopal (BME) Church.

At the center of a two-block neighborhood, the BME Church is still operated by the descendants of freedom seekers and served by a congregation of descendants too, albeit a small flock. A few of the original buildings from that era still stand, built by the hands of runaways, as

does another historic house of prayer in the Zion Baptist Church just up the street. There too are actual bodies laying in unmarked graves in the 'hood in what were once graveyards, old boneyards for incredible humans that walked from as far away as the Gulf of Mexico to right here in the Niagara Region where St. Catharines is located—a few are now laying under a parking lot, empty plot, and a backyard or two. Yes, the old 'hood is sadly barren. But here in St. Catharines, in the lonely block that is the veritable end of the U.G.R.R., the North Star still shines down a sacred column of light upon the “Promised Land.” Spirits still inhabit the moonlit streets that were once impenetrable. No white man could enter this area back in the day unless a “friend” or known to the residents. Plain and simple, bounty hunters did try to come and recapture escapees, but most never returned and some literally lost their heads and were scattered. You won't find that reality in history books, nor mention of this neighborhood, let alone St. Catharines, in many “respected” historical writings from a U.S. perspective. The legendary John Brown, a holy man and the U.G.R.R.'s most radical abolitionist, who came to St. Catharines for his fateful few weeks with Tubman, had to wait nearly four days at a saloon uptown till an emissary was sent to bring him and his entourage to Mama Moses and her enclave. It was sometimes like the Wild West in these now ghost-ridden streets.

For the better part of twenty years, I have been captivated with Harriet “Mama Moses” Tubman and her fellow spirits of the Underground Railroad and what they can bestow upon the living. I have immersed myself in their conjures and traversed up and down the many historic trails and routes of freedom, meeting others who were dabbling in the mysticism of the U.G.R.R. or who were at least aware of it. I have shared rituals and ceremonies and written and lectured about the U.G.R.R. spirit world and their sacred gifts across North America. I have spent nights in their cemeteries, beside their graves—many unmarked without a headstone—communing, conjuring, and revering them.

The spirits of the freedom seekers have guided me through a doorway, back through the trails of freedom to gather their stories, their conjures, and their legacies. The very first Cairn and Cross I built as a symbol to honor the U.G.R.R. was upon grounds in St. Catharines with freedom seekers laying unmarked below. This combination of symbols is now the recognized grave marker among conjurers, workers, and even some official clergy and U.G.R.R. descendants for the forgotten spirits of the U.G.R.R. across North America, wherever and by whomever they are built. In this book, we will visit the mysteries of the Cairn and Cross as well as how to build and consecrate them and house those who visit thereafter from the realm of spirit.

I share all this because for validity it matters where I live and how I came to hear the voices of the U.G.R.R. and see their shadows cast by holy light. It matters because it's from here at the end of the U.G.R.R. that I learned the offerings, the magic, and where I first felt the uplifting blessings the spirits of freedom seekers can bestow to those who revere them well. Upon finishing this book, you will be armed with that formula and fully encouraged to enter their world and allow them to enter yours.

All of those years of practice resulting in much of the work within these pages and what it represents have not been without controversy. While I have been blessed to be befriended and gain trust among the descendants of freedom seekers and historic U.G.R.R. figures, there are also many Christians who feel they have a proprietary stake in the spiritual legacy of the Underground Railroad. Among them are those who feel disdain for my work, calling it “nefarious sorcery” and outright “devil worship.”

For many in academic circles, I'm perceived as an outlaw, a renegade, a lowly witchdoctor—and a white one at that. This is because I shine a spotlight on the taboo shadow world of rootwork, voodoo, and conjure that runs on the tracks of the U.G.R.R.: something too often relegated to superstition, witchcraft, heresy, or even simple ghost stories. But this is hardly something I can control.

In order to immerse oneself and work with the spirit world of the U.G.R.R., all its realities must be comprehended. And when it comes to reality, many of the most notable figures of the U.G.R.R.—from Harriet Tubman, John Brown, Frederick Douglass, and Thomas Garret to Mary Ellen Pleasant and Sojourner Truth—were immersed in a spirituality encompassing everything from Christian mysticism and evangelical teachings to spiritualism and voodoo, and some of them drew from all of this at some point in their lives. This is not something that academic or historical societies have focused upon in the past, and, in fact, many have avoided it the best they can. And these histories do not even touch on how many of the freedom seekers and runaways themselves were conjurers, rootworkers, and adherents of various ATRs.

In order to draw from the U.G.R.R. spirit world, we have to know that it was all of these things, as well as acknowledging all its facets. Freedom fighting is a messy business, and it was no different for the U.G.R.R. When we work with the spirits of the U.G.R.R., we need them to know we understand their legacy; they need to know we honor all that they sacrificed for their freedom, including their families and their own lives. We need them to know we have gratitude in our hearts as we approach them, for their struggle and survival against slavery has made our world a better place. The spirits of the U.G.R.R. are true heroes worthy of veneration, and venerate them we shall.

This book is a grimoire, a guidebook, a formulary of spells and conjurations that pertain to Harriet “Mama Moses” Tubman and the spirits of the Underground Railroad. We will learn a good deal of necessary history, as much as a book of this nature can contain, but at the same time we will be learning the formula to invoke the spirits of those histories. We will explore many famous figures of the U.G.R.R. along with their conjurations. We will learn the Conjunction of Harriet “Mama Moses” Tubman, the General. We will come to know the Conjunction of John Brown, the Captain, as well as the Conjunction of Mary Ellen Pleasant, the Mistress.

We will also come to know the conjurations and invocation process of a host of spirit families, of which many members are nameless, forgotten souls who manifest and surround Mama Moses as her “Followers.”

There are those who may find the material in my book to be challenging in regard to preconceived notions of rootwork as curses, domination spells, and fast luck which have been influenced by the commercial and peddled popular brands of “southern conjure” and “hoodoo,” much of it based upon fragments and reconstruction from a hyper-romanticized era in the early to mid 1900s I refer to as the “golden era.” The truth of the matter is I believe much of the nuance of these traditions is being lost. In the 1940s, conjure and hoodoo in Dallas were very different from the voodoo of New Orleans and the gris-gris swamp magic surrounding it. From Louisiana across to Tampa, all the practices were vastly different, as was much of the lingo. From Jackson up through St. Louis to Chicago, across to Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, and on to New York City, all the traditions, formulas, and spellwork were different. Similarities existed of course, but there was no one all-encompassing name to describe everything ranging from sorcery to faith healing, spiritual baptisms to juju, séance, or hoodoo. Nor was there an all-encompassing set of rules, traditions, or dogma. Also consider that entire regions from the Ozarks to the Appalachians were melting pots where traditions blended together and formed their own versions of conjure, different still from valley to mountain. What is being lost in my opinion is just how differently from one another the mystics of the early to mid 1900s performed their work.

For most there were no commercialized “condition oils,” fancily dressed candles, or commercial powders. The true mystics had their own way of doing things, whether working with a specific spirit housed in a lonely boneyard around the bend or voicing their own incantations learned from no one and not shared with anyone other than the spirits they worked with. This is not to say that mysteries and formula were not passed down, but it wasn’t in quite in the ways the modern commercialized and appropriated

techniques purport. It's gotten to the point now where folks are using High John the Conqueror root without even knowing who he was and what he meant to the enslaved African, never mind how to invoke him or awaken his root's power. In fact he is even being depicted on oil and candle labels as a white man or Spanish conquistador. In this book, we will learn about the true mystery of High John the Conqueror the folk hero, as well as his powerful magic and why it was sacred to the enslaved that were so brutally treated. Things like this happen because not enough actual practitioners of these traditions—the true mystics and renown workers—passed enough of it on to others. There simply were not enough of these unique folks to go around; they were remote and mysterious at the best of times. Folks during this golden era would frequently travel across numerous state lines in order to seek out a powerful conjure doctor or root woman for their magic. And many of those old conjure doctors would first and foremost rely upon the “power of place” where they dwelled: the plants and herbs of their local climate and region, as well as the spiritual legacy of their own ancestors. Most of them had ancestors who had been enslaved, and terribly so. The mystical legacy that existed was less about fancy commercialized terms, powders, and oils and more about healing and heartfelt reverence for those that came before you, who might be buried just up the road or in your backyard. Ingredients for magic and healing might be picked from your own front yard.

Some of the processes in these pages will seem familiar to many, Christians, conjurers, and rootworkers alike. Some of the Christian mysticism may also put off the ardent neopagan, but that is a part of the U.G.R.R. and its spirit world. Truth be told, there has been no greater community of support than that of the neopagans and witches of North America. While I have traveled across the continent and presenting at festivals and conferences with the Dragon Ritual Drummers, the Niagara Voodoo Shrine, or the New Orleans Voodoo Spiritual Temple, I found

their thirst and desire for more information and formulas to work with Mama Moses and the spirits of the U.G.R.R. to be an inspiration and the impetus for providing this book of conjures. I have endeavored to share portions of a generation's worth of work and mysteries that myself and a host of colleagues have unearthed, collected, created, and put into practice for those desiring to interact with, feed, and exalt inspiring and heroic spirits. No matter what our spiritual tradition, with an open heart and mind we can conjure, wield, and manifest via a spirit world uniquely North American and housed by spirits that are interconnected through a legacy of freedom and justice.

One point to remember is that there is no orthodoxy or dogma when it comes to conjure, rootwork, and voodoo. There is no single official set of rules, means, and ways. It all depends on where you live, the spiritual legacy and power of place it houses, and its connection to the African American experience. A unique aspect we will learn about in this book is that the U.G.R.R. indeed connected not only many parts of North America, but also its people and their ancestral history, and that goes for both black and white. The trails of freedom and its magic ran deep through the entire continent. The magical formula of spirit reverence that grows in my front yard here at the end of the U.G.R.R. grows too in yours; we are connected by arteries of ancestral blood and legacy so that we can all drink together from the cup of conjure and revere the spirit world that is the U.G.R.R.

The crucial focus of this book—and what truly matters—is the spirits of the U.G.R.R.: what they require, desire, and need. As we will see, they have been attainable and worked with for many generations in a smattering of ways across North America. However, this is the first time this information has been contained in one volume.



The Drinking Gourd



The Drinking Gourd and North Star Doorway

Before we learn of their spirits and their magics, I want to share the first and simplest of conjures for the spirits of the U.G.R.R., to set the tone through the most basic of formulas: our prayers of intent.

The North Star was sung to and wished upon as the great navigator those on the U.G.R.R. looked to to guide them out of bondage and point the way north. To stand beneath and draw the light of the North Star down upon us is a central sacred work with the spirits of the U.G.R.R. The North Star is a mirror that still reflects back to us the very eyes of those who gazed up toward it in prayer, vow, panic, and, for some, eventual joy. For many who fled on the tracks of freedom this was the only aid they had. No other codes, mysteries, or promise of friends waiting farther on down the line was there for them to hold on to, just the hope that somehow it would all work out. The North Star was the encourager to keep going, the comforter from above, a devoted eye of the ancestors looking down upon their people with love.

This is the holiest celestial mystery definitive of the U.G.R.R. and its legacy: the North Star's ability to house and reflect back to us that which was conjured into it. Yes, the freedom seeker used it to navigate. It was a

symbol and code among friends and supporters, immortalized as a holy light for those greatest achievements of self-emancipation ever known. But it was also a mirror, and a mirror retains all that it captures. For every victorious moment of a freedom seeker standing upon his or her metaphorical Land of Canaan, across the borderline of the “River Jordan” gazing upon her with unfathomable joy, there is sadness too. How does one find words to describe the level of sadness and tragedy retained and reflected back? We can look to the North Star with dry eyes and praise its heavenly light and all that it stood for, but all her mysteries must be grappled with. For she also captures forever the last moments of those who were not successful, whose tear-filled eyes gazed one last time at their comforter before their life was stolen away. Many of the old U.G.R.R. tracks to freedom are still in haunt; not all spirits who wander them have found their way into the arms of Mama Moses and her Followers or the shrines of their living descendants. Even today some of those that were successful now lie beneath parking lots, their names forgotten, headstones absent.

This is the nature of this tradition of conjure, why we do it, and the blessings exchanged between human and spirit: We help those who are still lost to navigate their way and continue to elevate the spirits of the U.G.R.R. by bringing them home to their families, whether they are here among the living or loves residing in the hereafter. For every spirit or mystery we work with and explore within this book, we strengthen our connection to the spirit world. For every Cairn and Cross we build, every mojo or talisman we create, every spiritual sung and invocation announced, we are enhancing our powers of conjuration toward this very work.

When we stand immersed in the North Star’s subtle yet sacred light, let your focus blur to just beyond your peripheral so that the doorway that the mirror provides will open to you. Let your will and prayers center on the intent that the spirits continue to find their loved ones and friends that helped them and end in an embrace in spirit. Allow that aim be carried to the winds. Let every conjure you do for the spirits be unto this purpose,

your shrine to the spirits of the U.G.R.R. act as a safe house, the symbols and the spirituals you sing and whisper a means of encouragement. Bring them to a place of comfort. And from there, for every time we work among the conjures of the U.G.R.R., let them finally embrace their loved ones, Mama Moses, the Diviners, and the Healers. Let them hear the call to séance and find solace among the spiritualists. Let them give the warrior handshake to Captain Brown. Once within the fold of the spirit world of the U.G.R.R., these spirits will be able to choose their trail from there: to carry on to their god and the angels, to arrive and love their descendants, or to live among the active spirits so that the work can continue.

Every hug and handshake shared in the spirit world of the U.G.R.R. is possible because of the sacred work that still must be done. We must still fill the spirit world with light, protection, and sustenance and never forget its need to exist. For we will always need this spirit world and its heroic fraternity where white and black fought together, whose bonds have remained intact into the afterlife. It's up to us to add to that afterlife and nurture it, making it stronger and safer and sharing it with those who possess a capacity to take the flame and illuminate their part of the continual interconnected quilt of freedom. Now more than ever we need to be able to draw from this beautiful spirit world, conjure it into our reality, and in doing so feed and strengthen it.

Many spirits have already chosen to work among the ghost tracks, trails, homesteads, statuary, altars, and graves of prominence so that those who were forgotten can continue their journey and reach eternal freedom. And for each of us working under the North Star exalting and feeding those working spirits, we enable and uplift them hand in hand.

Find Your Connection with the North Star Mirror

No matter where we live—in light-saturated cities or under clear country skies—the North Star is visible up above, twinkling in the heavens.

Locate the North Star, also known as the polestar, wherever you are. You can do this by finding the secret coded companion she sits beside: the Drinking Gourd, named so by the Africans for its similarity to a literal hollow gourd used for drinking, immortalized in spirituals but most commonly known as the Big Dipper, and to us in this tradition as the Cup of Conjure. City dwellers may have to travel a few blocks to get to a good place to view it, but many of the practices in these pages require a little bit of work at times to achieve, even what appears to be the most basic.

The Big Dipper is a constellation that never sets in the northern sky. It circles around the North Star. Use whatever means you have to find the cardinal direction north in your area, then look for the stars that form a bowl on the end of a handle. Folks name constellations for what they look like, and this grouping looks like a dipper or a drinking gourd. Now look at the bowl of the Big Dipper. The two stars that make up the end of the cupping shape form a line, and if you follow the line out of the Big Dipper and off into space with your eyes, you will find the bright beacon of the North Star.

Once you've located the Big Dipper, take some time to make a connection. Ponder the Drinking Gourd, its mysteries and cloaked meaning, and how many drank from that very cup to achieve eventual freedom. Then connect the two celestial mysteries: Once you have drawn the line to the North Star, fixate upon it, gazing and bonding with it by any means you can. Remember it is a mirror, the gateway to the U.G.R.R. spirit world that will swing open. At this moment you are the gatekeeper.

Let your vision blur just a bit, at least to your peripheral, and you will not only be the gatekeeper but a beacon. You will be a lantern bearer, your spirit will become illuminated by its holy light, and the spirits will see you—through the buildings that may be around you and the noise that may surround you, they will hear you.

Imagine at this moment that the wandering spirits that were lost on the trails of freedom will catch a glimpse of you, that those who are already elevated and exist among the U.G.R.R. spirit world will spot your

light, and indeed Mama Moses will see you too. Mama Moses and her Followers will look into your soul and know it as kind, as an ancestor or as a friend. Who knows how many other conjurers on any given night are gazing upon the North Stars mirror for this simplest, yet sacred act and how many more spirits still wander, eyes fixed upon her light?

Speak aloud or just in a whisper, and let the spirits know you are a lantern bearer and that your shrines and work are for them. Each of us engaging in this practice creates our own grid in an ever evolving constellation of illuminated souls fixed upon the earth. We are the beacons, the “shooflys” in the old code for the trusted allies on the Underground Railroad, the guides.

The Lantern Bearer's Prayer

Do this work as often as possible or when time presents itself. Praying to the North Star will enhance your connection to Mama Moses and the spirits of the U.G.R.R. Reciting the prayer out loud is the most effective.

To the Drinking Gourd high in the sky,

Let me drink from your chalice of silvery light;

Let me open the gate whilst quenched from your holy cup of conjure.

Sweet North Star, great lantern bearer of the sky,

Mirror who reflects God's light from afar,

Let my lantern bear your sacred light

and I will cast it to the shadows.

Let those who still have rivers to cross be guided by my lantern's light.

Let a column of your holy light beam down upon my home.

Let our lanterns shine, connected, eternal and forevermore.



Young Harriet Tubman



The Conjunction of Harriet “Mama Moses” Tubman

I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say—I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.

—HARRIET TUBMAN

In the spirit world of the U.G.R.R. Harriet Tubman is the “General”—and for good reason. It was a title bestowed upon her in a mystical and spiritual proclamation by none of other than the martyr, the insurrectionist, and her friend and brother-in-arms “Captain” John Brown. She was fond of this name till her dying days. Harriet Tubman was a mystic, a healer, a warrior—she was Mama Moses who, like her biblical namesake, led her people to freedom.

Before we begin to work with the powerful and beautiful spirit of Mama Moses, let's have a look at some of the highlights of this fascinating holy woman's life.

Harriet Tubman's Early Years

Harriet Tubman was born Araminta Ross in approximately 1822 in Dorchester County, Maryland. Until she reached young adulthood, she

was called Minty. Her mother, whose name was Rit, was a slave with a position in the “big house” where the plantation master lived and was a conjure woman like her mother had been before her: Minty’s grandmother, presumably renamed Modesty by her slaveholders, was an Ashanti who had been brought over from what is now Ghana. Minty was always aware of her Ashanti ancestry. Minty’s father Ben Ross, who was born into slavery in America but had his freedom granted to him in middle age, was a skilled woodsman and woodworker, a man respected by everyone: his fellow enslaved, free people of color, and the masters for whom he labored.

During the time she was enslaved, Minty was beaten brutally. By the time she was six years old, Minty was already caring for her baby brother, so she was then sent out to labor as a nursemaid and to provide child care in other homesteads. There young Minty suffered more physical abuse. She learned to improvise quickly and to wear numerous layers of clothing to absorb the constant whippings and beatings.

**I grew up like a neglected weed, – ignorant of liberty, having no
experience of it. Then I was not happy or contented.**

—HARRIET TUBMAN IN BENJAMIN DREW, *THE REFUGEES*

Her young life would change forever after a brutal and fateful assault by a wicked man. At about the age of fifteen, while running into town for goods, she encountered a fellow enslaved youth she knew personally who had slipped away from his plantation without permission. His furious overseer soon appeared and wanted Minty to help apprehend the boy. She refused, and when the boy ran for it, the overseer threw a several-pound metal weight toward him. It struck Minty in the head instead. This was a severe and life-threatening injury. Bloodied and experiencing head trauma, she spent days drifting in and out of consciousness. Her master did not think she was worth medical attention and had her back at hard labor within weeks.

This head injury is considered the catalyst that brought on her life-long visions, prophetic dreams, and hearing the voice of God. It was her

initiation into the world of the mysteries. Spirituality had been a part of her core from a young age; from Bible stories told to her to the lore and legends of her maternal grandmother from Ghana, young Minty was aware of the worlds of African spirits as well as the Holy Spirit and everything in between. One of the foremost Tubman historians, Dr. Kate Clifford Larsen says in *Bound for the Promised Land*, “Tubman’s religiosity was a deeply personal spiritual experience, unquestionably rooted in powerful evangelical teachings, but also reinforced and nurtured through strong African cultural traditions.” Her history of spirituality and the head injury came together to form a perfect storm to create the mystic she would become and the general in the war she would soon fight. These would be the foundations of a holy woman, rootworker, healer, and warrior. Young Minty had also seen firsthand that resistance was viable, even if might seem futile at times. She not only knew all about Nat Turner’s initially powerful rebellion and the brutal result from 1831, but considered him a local hero, as many of the enslaved did.

Her family’s slave master Edward Brodess had already sold some of Minty’s siblings south, never to be heard from again. Not long after her injury, he made it known that he planned on selling her youngest brother, a child named Moses. Rit hid her infant son for over a month with the help of fellow slaves, as well as some free people of color. When the time finally came that Brodess and the buyer were to enter Rit’s dwelling to retrieve the child, Rit resisted and threw a curse at them, promising death to whomever touched her child. The sale was called off. This act of resistance had an impact upon Minty in more ways than one.

**God’s time [Emancipation] is always near. He set the North Star
in the heavens; He gave me the strength in my limbs;
He meant I should be free.**

—HARRIET TUBMAN TO EDNAH DOW CHENEY, IN KATE CLIFFORD LARSEN,
BOUND FOR THE PROMISED LAND

Through years of child care and nursemaid duties Minty had gained a reputation for doing extremely hard labor, preferably alone—which was not uncommon for enslaved women in order to avoid brutal treatment from the house mistress and sexual advances by the masters. During these years of hard labor, a new opportunity sealed her future as an Underground Railroad conductor and warrior. Minty’s master allowed her to hire herself out: for an annual fee paid to her master she could work for herself, enabling her to buy her own livestock and grow her own food to sell and trade in the hopes of saving enough money to possibly purchase her own freedom. This era brought her back into close proximity with her father Ben Ross, which made Minty very happy.

Being in close quarters to her father brought her more indispensable tools. While surrounded by mostly black men working on docks and in timber crews, Tubman was able to learn secret codes of communication and networks of travel that were mysteries among black mariners. The mariners were familiar with a world seemingly far away including the shipyards and ports in Baltimore, communities and landscapes all along the Chesapeake Bay, right up to New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The black mariners as well as Tubman’s father were able to share safe locations as well as ones fraught with danger. This secret language that was essentially a map and code of communication would come in handy soon enough.

As a young woman living through harsh realities that enslavement brought, blessed and a young prophetess as she may be, she still felt the very human desire for love. Her first love was for a man named John Tubman, a free man of color. Relationships between slaves and free people of color were not uncommon at that time or in that region, although they brought with them a lot of complications. Any children born to such a couple were considered property of the slave master of the mother. Their time together is shrouded in mystery, but John and Minty were married in 1844 when they “jumped the broom.” They lived together in a small cottage, were for

a time a happy and loving couple, and it was then that she changed her name from Minty to “Harriet” in what is believed to be a combination of a religious conversion and the honoring of a relative, quite possibly her mother. She would be known as Harriet Tubman from then on and never changed her name again.

Harriet experienced a bout of ill health in 1849, during which she had potent nightmares of being sold south. Harriet came to find out that her master was indeed actively trying to unload her because of her sickness—regardless of her marriage. Between her impending sale and the continual enslavement of her relatives, she began to pray fervently that her master would change his mind. She later said, “I prayed all night long for my master till the first of March; and all the time he was bringing people to look at me, and trying to sell me.” Once a sale appeared final, she said, “I changed my prayer. First of March I began to pray, ‘Oh Lord, if you ain’t never going to change that man’s heart, kill him, Lord, and take him out of the way.’” A week later her master Edward Brodess was dead as the result of an unknown illness.

But this was not the end of Harriet’s trouble. His estate would soon be distributed, and there was now a serious chance that Harriet would be sold off and her family split up. This was not an option for her: it was now or never. Her desire to escape slavery became more than just a yearning for justice and started to take shape as a plan. This would be when her visions, voices, and blessings must be acted upon: she would be free or die trying.

I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other; for no man should take me alive; I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted, and when the time came for me to go, the Lord would let them take me.

—HARRIET TUBMAN IN SARAH BRADFORD,
HARRIET TUBMAN: THE MOSES OF HER PEOPLE, 1886

Harriet had tried to convince John to flee with her and members of her family heading north to freedom. He, however, by all accounts was not interested. He was a free man after all, had a business, and, despite his wife's pleas, wanted none of it. It was no different on the night she fled. She got word to her mother that she was leaving, and that night sang a coded spiritual to her fellow trusted slaves, "I will meet you in the morning, when I reach the promised land, on the other side of Jordon for I am bound for the Promised Land." To this day her exact route and where she took refuge along the way are debated, but it is known she fled in the middle of night for a journey of nearly ninety miles (145 kilometers). Following the North Star through Delaware and up to Pennsylvania, her path would have taken her anywhere from one to three weeks on foot. This had to have been a monumental initiation for her will and spirit: to leave the family she loved so much behind, to abandon her home and husband. Those hungry weeks must have seemed an eternity.

She never revealed any details about her first trip, but certainly did share her thoughts on the moment she realized she was free: "When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven." This is the moment when the legend of Harriet Tubman would take root. Tasting freedom, she would become the mysterious and soon to be "wanted dead or alive" conductor, a spirit in the night, leading as many others to it as she could. Her haunting and feared persona was just emerging.

The Legend Grows

**I was a stranger in a strange land, My father, my mother, my brothers,
and sisters, and friends were in Maryland.**

—HARRIET TUBMAN IN SARAH BRADFORD,
HARRIET TUBMAN: THE “MOSES OF HER PEOPLE”

Harriet Tubman’s first return trip back into hostile territory from the Free North was to retrieve members of her family, and in fact many of her sojourns back and forth were to gather family, friends, and colleagues. In 1850 the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, making the penalties for aiding escaped slaves very severe, and even in free states law enforcement had to help capture and return escapees to their “owners.” The free states could no longer be an option for resettling refugees from slavery for Tubman.

**I wouldn’t trust Uncle Sam with my people no longer,
I brought ’em all clear off to Canada.**

—HARRIET TUBMAN IN SARAH BRADFORD,
HARRIET TUBMAN: THE “MOSES OF HER PEOPLE”

Her new base of operations was now in St. Catharines, Ontario, in the Niagara Region of Canada. It was just far enough from the U.S. border to make it hard for bounty hunters to enter town and escape with their lives intact. It offered a community that to a degree supported the freedom seekers, and a section of town that still stands today became their Promised Land of “Canaan.” Her house of prayer and base of operations was the historic British Methodist Episcopal (BME) Church, Salem Chapel, a still-functioning congregation and celebrated place in Canadian history—served and operated by freedom seeker descendants.

Abolitionist and spiritualist William Lloyd Garrison was the first to call Tubman “Moses,” in reference to the prophet in the Book of Exodus

who led the Hebrews out of bondage to the pharaoh. Incidentally, Tubman took much of her biblical inspiration from the Old Testament with its focus on deliverance and was not fond of the narrative contained in the New Testament, feeling it promoted obedience among the enslaved.

During these years of conducting freedom seekers to safety Tubman's legend grew and her mysticism gained repute not only among those who knew her well, but also those who traveled with her, aided her, and even those endeavoring to catch her, for at this point there was a sizable reward for the capture of Harriet "Mama Moses" Tubman. Her seemingly supernatural powers, psychic visions, incantations, and unique cures were the stuff of a conjure woman, it was and is a part of her identity to this day, at least for those who care to shed light upon it.

Harriet's friend, colleague, and the legendary abolitionist Thomas Garrett wrote of her mystical side (collected in James McGowan, *Station Master on the Underground Railroad*), "I inform you that Harriet has a good deal of the Quaker about her. She is a firm believer of spiritual manifestations." Garrett, himself a spiritualist, knew that she possessed extrasensory powers and abilities. In his writings he relays how many times she seemed to know when he had money for her, "whether clairvoyance, or the divine impression on her mind from the source of all power, I cannot tell; but, certain it was that she had a guide within herself other than the written word." Garrett also said of her, "I never met any person of any color who had more confidence in the voice of God." Tubman spent a great deal of time with Garrett and was present at some of his spiritualist meetings, contributing to and honing work with spirits and ancestors and communing with the "divine."

Runaways interviewed by William Wells Brown in St. Catharines, and quoted in *Station Master on the Underground Railroad*, said, "She had supernatural powers and the 'charm'" . . . "The women herself felt she had the charm, and this feeling, no doubt, nerved her up, gave her courage, and made all who followed her feel safe in her hands." She was known to

wander various cemeteries in solitude in the “witching hours” when time presented itself.

New England author, journalist, and philanthropist Franklin Benjamin Sanborn is also quoted in *Station Master on the Underground Railroad* as saying, “She is the most shrewd and practical person in the world yet she is a firm believer in omens, dreams and warnings . . . Her dreams, misgivings and forewarnings ought not to be omitted in any life of hers, particularly when it comes to John Brown.” And we won’t. When it came to the larger-than-life insurrectionist and feared freedom fighter “Captain” John Brown; there was indeed a cosmic and spiritual connection between them, as we will explore in a later chapter. Suffice it to say here that it was Brown who bestowed upon her a title that lasts till this day as her legacy, that of “General Tubman,” when he was in St. Catharines seeking her counsel before the raid on Harpers Ferry. He said to her that when he needed to feel her presence and inspiration he would call out loud three times “General Tubman” as an invocation. It was a mystical proclamation to honor her immense work of freeing slaves, knowledge of the land, and unrivaled spiritual force. They were warriors, unlike their mutual friend Frederick Douglass. Tubman was all in for the captain’s plans for Harpers Ferry; she was all in when it came to his brand of justice and doling out death to slavers and the like; she was all in when it came to fighting slavery by any means necessary. She would sadly never see him again; he was hanged for his raid on Harpers Ferry. Tubman mourned Brown as a martyr.

Harriet Tubman was celebrated, supported, and an inspiration to many of the heavy hitters paramount to the U.G.R.R. Frederick Douglass, who himself escaped slavery and was the most famous of abolitionists and orators for the cause; William Still, the Philadelphia-based black abolitionist and impeccable recordkeeper; and William Lloyd Garrison, a prominent white abolitionist, were all interconnected, corresponded with each other, and were soldiers on the front lines of funneling freedom seekers to safe haven. Tubman had love for them all, but drew huge amounts of inspiration

from the amazing Douglass. In the hard years of Tubman's life spent in midnight swamps, hills, and in disguise, Douglass knew how hard she tried and toiled in constant danger and always had high regard for her, something that brought her much comfort.

She continued to be almost a ghostlike entity to those in the slave states, who feared her and her supernatural ways. She was known to come out of some of her trances and dreams with knowledge of an ambush that lay in wait and change course. And they would come to find out later that there had indeed been an ambush waiting. She wielded her "charm" and spiritual powers as the most feared conductor of the U.G.R.R., divining by animal activity, clouds, rocks, and bones as well as her dreams and visions. She reputedly carried a gourd as a container, housing roots and herbs that she would shake in certain times of need. She was known to say on certain trips that those in tow should pray to their god and she would pray to hers and things will be just fine.

From Canada to New York, Maryland to Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania to Virginia, she haunted the trails of freedom, gathering and guiding hundreds of freedom seekers in her time. Her legacy and lore spread from plantation to plantation among the enslaved and those who endeavored to flee; tales of renowned tactics of trickery and cunning reigned. As far away as Texas, those in bondage knew of Mama Moses. A solitary runaway from Texas is noted in *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (ed. B. A. Botkin) as saying, "I's hoping and praying all the time I meet up with that Harriet Tubman woman who takes slaves to Canada. She always travels the underground railroad, as they calls it, travels by night and hides out in the day. She sure sneaks them out of the south, and I think shes the brave woman." She threw tricks and outsmarted bounty hunters; she was known to pick up roosters and carry them to pretend to be a slave while in hostile territory as well as pretending to read when necessary, for the word was out that she could not. Like Moses himself she conjured and defied the odds.

She carried a revolver in those years and wasn't afraid to use it, whether on slavers, bounty hunters, or the hounds they enlisted. Her "piece" was also reputedly an extra incentive for wavering travelers on her track. Once a journey had begun, it was too dangerous for runaways to change their mind and return to the plantation; they would surely be tortured or bribed to give up valuable information. So in those weak moments she was known to pull out her gun and say, "Dead people tell no tales. You go on or die, one way or another you'll be free," according to Earl Conrad in *Harriet Tubman*.

The Civil War and After

Harriet Tubman's time on the Railroad would come to an end when the American Civil War began, but her legacy as a conjure woman and warrior was far from over.

God won't let master Lincoln beat the South till he does the right thing.

—HARRIET TUBMAN IN JAMES MCGOWAN AND WILLIAM KASHATUS,
HARRIET TUBMAN: A BIOGRAPHY

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Tubman was frustrated with the fact that slavery was still legal in the southern states and felt it was futile to fight toward victory till all were emancipated. She nevertheless supported the Union, left Canada, and actively sought a place within their ranks to help. She soon became a renowned nurse, as well as offering valuable intelligence on the trails and routes she had been successfully navigating in her years as a clandestine U.G.R.R. conductor.

As a nurse her cures in dentistry and for smallpox, along with her seeming immunity to the diseases, also reinforced her reputation as a blessed mystic. Her folk medicine combined spirituals and incantations that had been honed on the freedom trails. Her presence was celebrated among the black Union soldiers. As quoted in *Station Master on the Underground Railroad*, it was said, "When the Negro put on the Blue (joined Union

Army), Moses was in her glory and traveled from camp to camp, being always treated in the most respectful manner . . . These black men would have died for this woman, for they believed she had the ‘charm.’”

In 1863 Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, making the war something Tubman could now really get behind and support on a tactical level—and in one instance in a way that is legend. Her knowledge of the lands and covert activity on the U.G.R.R. as well as her warrior spirit would be paramount to the success of the famous Combahee River Raid. Tubman had already contributed intel-wise in the capture of Jacksonville, Florida, but with the Combahee raid she became the first woman to lead an armed assault during the Civil War. In June of 1863 Tubman led three steamboats, maneuvering through Confederate mines, to land and raid several plantations. Once ashore the Union army set flame to plantations, raided supplies, and destroyed infrastructure. They also freed up to 750 slaves. Steamboat whistles rang out to signal to the enslaved to escape and board the vessels. The chaos was intense; men, women, and children clamoring to get on the boats with livestock, food, and supplies. “I never saw such a sight,” Tubman said. Almost all of the newly freed men immediately joined the Union army. Harriet Tubman was a general indeed.

Tubman would also later work with Colonel Robert Gould Shaw at the battle of Fort Wagner, where she made and served his last meal. In *Bound for the Promised Land*, she said of the terrible fighting, “And then we saw the lightning, and that was the guns; and then we heard the thunder, and that was the big guns; and then we heard the rain falling, and that was the drops of blood falling; and when we came to get the crops, it was dead men that we reaped.”

For the last two years of the Civil War Tubman tended to Union soldiers as a nurse, continued to help free slaves in raids, and inspired soldiers both black and white. It would not be till 1899 that she received a military pension and commendation for her work in the war, however.



Harriet Tubman, 1911

Mama Moses would marry again in 1869. Her second love was a Civil War veteran and black man named Nelson Davis, who was about twenty-two years her junior, and they were together for twenty love-filled years.

Her later years were spent in Auburn, New York, tending to her now completely free family—those that she could find. Along with

her mother and father, much of her extended family lived together in her home and boardinghouse. She spent those years also supporting the women's suffrage movement alongside Susan B. Anthony, as well as hosting biographers and media and sharing her stories and legacy. But times were always tough financially. In 1897 she was happy to be acknowledged by Britain's Queen Victoria for her unique humanitarian legacy and contribution to fighting slavery. The queen awarded her a silver medal, a letter of accommodation, money, and a white silk shawl that she proudly wore in her twilight years.

Harriet "Mama Moses" Tubman succumbed to pneumonia on March 10, 1913, surrounded by friends and family. Shortly before her death her final words, as quoted in the *Auburn Citizen* on March 11, were, "I go to prepare a place for you." Mama Moses was buried with semi-military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, and her grave is a place of pilgrimage and a veritable shrine.

We see a woman in Mama Moses who was undoubtedly a mystic in the truest sense. This woman faced racism in its rawest form born into the subhuman treatment of slavery but still found a way through her spirituality and courage to fight for freedom. This woman fought to preserve her family and demonstrated her devotion to kin by risking her very life on numerous occasions so they too could be free. This woman suffered the most horrendous racial injustices at the hands of white men and women yet possessed the complex capacity to later accept them as friends, confidants, and spiritual colleagues. We see a woman in Mama Moses who fought like a warrior in a way to make men of her time envious and whose cunning was invaluable to trained military tacticians. She was a master at the arts of disguise and distraction, avoiding being captured in the hostile territories she returned to time and again. We see a healer, and a mysterious one at that, with cures and means drawing from the esoteric as well as pragmatic. We see a woman in Mama Moses who fought for justice on every level till her dying days, bringing equality to men and woman of

every creed and color. We have a spirit in Mama Moses that is tangible and attainable for council, blessings, and inspiration as we endeavor and fight for our own freedom, humanity, and spiritual needs. The spirit of Harriet “Mama Moses” Tubman is still holding court, and she still has many gifts to give for those with many rivers still to cross.

The Elevation of Mama Moses

While this book is a first as a grimoire of work pertaining to the Underground Railroad spirit world as a whole, and while I have dedicated over seventeen years of work and conjuration to Mama Moses, when it comes to reverence for Harriet Tubman I am far from the first. That she was buried with semi-military honors, presided over by local, state, and federal government officials is an honor few receive. This is a type of ceremony that immortalizes a person and elevates her to a place of reverence. Her grave almost immediately became a place of pilgrimage for descendants and surviving freedom seekers, clergy of many faiths and adherents to numerous religious practices that came to honor her, as well as average people inspired to pay their respects. All of these acts, prayers, and exaltation make a spirit that much more tangible and accessible in a way that is not common. This is an honor, and her spirit accepted the charge.

Within years of her passing many folks claimed to have been visited by the spirit of Harriet Tubman, whether in dreams, visions, or séance and divination. Her spirit had even manifested in our physical realm to the point of being called a ghost or “haint” at some of the famous locations where she walked, lived, fought, loved, and prayed. Within a very short time her spirit was already manifesting, traveling and arriving where she was called to go whether of her own volition or via the petition of others.

In those short years after her death, in fact, many of the deceased historic figures of the U.G.R.R. continued to manifest among us. Many of them too had received elaborate ceremonial burials and reverence for

their martyrdom, and properties, statuary, and plaques marked their places of renowned valor and humanitarian work. These few unique spirits, who while living had changed the fabric of society in a just and clandestine network, were still compelled to be connected in spirit. They forged bonds that lasted past a lifetime, and that is really such a rare, sacred, and beautiful thing to behold. Slowly but surely these spirits began to gather and continue to be connected in tangible ways.

In the era before and after WWII, in the midst of the Great Migration circa 1910–1970 when millions southern black Americans traveled north to the industrial cities, hoodoo, voodoo, and conjure also proliferated. Some of the mystics and conjurers from both Canada and the United States were claiming to be able to work with the spirit of Harriet Tubman, known as Black Moses and Auntie Freedom. In the late 1960s and early '70s Harriet Tubman prayer cards circulated in Detroit, Michigan, a city that was a gateway of freedom during the U.G.R.R.—named “Midnight” in U.G.R.R. code—leading to Windsor, Ontario, across the Detroit River. In 1978 Harriet Tubman was commemorated on a U.S. postal stamp still in circulation to this day. In 1979 renowned American artist Paul Collins released his famous painting *The Underground Railroad* featuring Harriet Tubman and freedom seekers traversing nighttime swamp. This painting sold and still sells prints in the hundreds of thousands. It immediately adorned churches, spiritualist temples, government buildings, museums, and homes.

By the 1990s there were adherents to Santeria, aka Regla Lucumi, in New York City who had welcomed Harriet Tubman as an Egun, the elevated ancestors within this tradition, as well as vodou adherents welcoming her into a family of Ogou, a nation of spirits within Haitian vodou. In the 1990s, Tubman’s legacy and spirit were publicized to unprecedented levels by the sacred poetry and reverence of Brooklyn’s Linda Cousins-Newton. And in June 2000, Harriet “Mama Moses” Tubman was honored by Ghana’s first female chief, Nana Osei Boakye, who

oversaw the “enstooling” of Mama Moses as the first known ancestor to be posthumously acknowledged as a “Queen Mother,” naming her “Nana Awo Boatema II,” which was also made possible in part by the incredible work and devotion of Cousins-Newton.

In 2011 I cofacilitated a ceremonial honoring with Prince Bamidele Bajowa of the royal house of Rebuja in Nigeria to bestow blessings and a title upon Mama Moses, as well as a sacrament offered for her followers who were of Yoruba descent. In 2014 the asteroid 241528 Tubman was named for her by the IAU Minor Planet Center. Statuary of Mama Moses adorns many cities in North America where she once walked, and in 2016 the U.S. Treasury Department announced that Harriet Tubman would appear on the forthcoming redesign of the U.S. twenty dollar bill. And on March 11, 2017, the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Maryland opened to the public.

These are but a few instances to demonstrate just how exalted of a legacy she has. The spirit of Harriet Tubman was elevated and chose to join the ranks of glorified ancestors to humanity long ago. She continues to bless, guide, and manifest among those who call to her sacred spirit. A statue of “Nana” Tubman now stands in Aburi, Ghana, her ancestral home and birthplace of her maternal grandmother Modesty.

Working with Harriet “Mama Moses” Tubman

As we can see from these highlights of her incredible blessed life and unique skill sets, there are numerous reasons that everyone from root-workers, witches, and pagans to members of the African traditional religions and Christian conjurers would revere Mama Moses and want to petition for her blessings. She helps those seeking knowledge of cures and folk medicines, where at times she will inspire and plant within you a previously unknown conjure or cure as well as the rhyme and reason behind a particular magic you seek to create. She can be called on to help

remove binds or blocks holding us back: abusive relationships, addictions, or other things that hinder our growth and freedom. She can aid us in opening chains and shackles of our own design: habits and emotions that do not serve us well and attitudes within us that need to be changed in order for us to truly grow past our usual ways and means. She can be petitioned to help us find our path toward that which we seek: new jobs and careers as well creative projects that may seem unattainable or finishing off spiritual work seemingly stagnant and unrealized. She assists folks in finding their ancestral roots and brings them to the well of their descendants—especially people of African descent. She is after all an African Queen Mother, a Nana whose stool sits with her royal ancestral contemporaries in Ghana. She can guide us through dark times in our life, reminding us to persevere and that there is no mountain that can't be climbed, no river we cannot cross. She and her followers can illuminate with their spectral lanterns otherwise dark paths we would have trouble navigating and traversing, whether those routes are physical or esoteric. Mama Moses and her followers can be called to for “faith healing” as she and her Healers can be invoked to lay their spirit hands upon you or your loved ones and lend their strength in the healing that you seek. As well Mama Moses and her Followers can help enhance and hone our divination and seership. The reasons to seek her blessings are truly countless to be honest, but there is one thing Mama Moses is never called for—and that is to harm or curse.

Mama Moses and her holy spirit, blessed by her god, ancestors, and draped in divine glory, is not to be called on to hurt a single person or aid in any magic that would. There are plenty of spiritual entities for that sort of thing, but she is not one of them, neither are her Followers. Now if one is in an abusive or unhealthy relationship, for example—and this is a conjure blessing I have seen her deliver on for many folks over the years, almost all of them women—one still needs to focus on the task at hand: being free of it. It's always best in such circumstances to center your

intent on release from the relationship and attaining what you need to leave and claim your soul, your life, and your freedom. This is a powerful blessing she does indeed bestow rather than calling down retribution. And of course, one would call to her for the simple blessing of her just manifesting and gifting but a drop of her spiritual power that can change you on an alchemical level.

So as we can see, we can all call to Mama Moses for blessings from which, if asked for and petitioned correctly and from the right angle, pure intention can be realized. The spiritual and ancestral well of Mama Moses is an inspiring and powerful concoction and can truly change us and our surroundings for the absolute better.

The Altar for Mama Moses

Let's break down how to set up an altar or workspace for Mama Moses with her offerings and ways to connect and commune with her sacred spiritual force. It is most beneficial in many spiritual traditions—as a basic premise—to create an altar or shrine to not only honor but also please the intended spiritual entity. This is a place to commune and work with the spirit whether at home or out in nature, a portal to their realm. Not everyone can build a large shrine to Mama Moses with all of her tools and items, but small altars can still be quite effective.

CLEANSING YOUR SPACE

It is standard practices to cleanse your space before you set up your altar. Making the space sacred will change the energy of it so that when you place your items there, it will be ready for a spirit's presence. It's good to enlist Florida Water or Hoyt's Cologne, both commonly used colognes with a high alcohol content and strong aromatic quintessence, by sprinkling the surface and area with one. Holy water sprinkled or incense wafted about the area is also a good practice to do just before building a shrine to Mama Moses. Better yet, enlist more than one of the aforementioned. Burning

incense will also remove any residual energetic charge in the area you want to dedicate to her—or any shrine for that matter.

It is worth noting that Hoyt's Cologne is the traditional means used most by North American hoodoo and conjure workers, commonly found in certain barbershops and salons, especially during the "golden era" I have previously referred to. Florida Water comes from the more Caribbean-influenced communities and cultures. With the proliferation of ATRs and those that appropriate them, Florida Water has become the far more popular concoction in this modern era.

ALTAR SPACES

Your altar, shrine, or workspace to honor Mama Moses can be any surface or place that you have available, even a shelf will do. The shrine is akin to an ancestor altar, a place that houses items that the intended spirit was fond of and would bring them comfort and familiarity when they are present. You can use fabric to cover the surface or not; it's up to you and the creativity you are inspired to. There are shrines to Mama Moses that are small wooden shelves with some of her tools and larger ones that exist that have all the accoutrements we will list here for her as well as skulls and skeletal decorations to represent the dead. There are folks that house her in a pot or cauldron similar to the way of working with the Caribbean spirit La Madama. Then there are folks like me with an entire house dedicated to her with shrines to Mama Moses and her Followers throughout. It's really up to you, and it will undoubtedly change as time and the manifestation of spirits grow.

Your shrine, whatever form it takes, is a space that is dedicated to Mama Moses and her Followers. It is a place where you can go to focus on her blessings and spirit and a nexus that will be a portal to the inspiring world of her and the spirits of the U.G.R.R. The shrine to Mama Moses is a location where you can give her prayers and offerings and you can ask blessings of her and seek her favor for your needs. At the very least, for starters, a photo

of Mama Moses, a glass of water, a candle, and the conjure symbol will be enough to get your space in a position to honor and please her.

ACCOUTREMENTS FOR MAMA MOSES

The items and tools listed below can be used to create an altar or workspace to commune with and revere Mama Moses and can be left as-is or added to as your shrine grows. As time and familiarity bring you into your work, don't question whatever presents itself or speaks to you as a tool, item, or image for her altar: that is spirit talking.

- A photo of Harriet Tubman. There are a few wonderful ones out there, but the photos in this book are my favorites.
- A glass of water. This is paramount for most spiritual traditions that honor the glorious dead. Water is life and can quench a spirit's thirst.
- A candle. Preferably use a jar or seven-day candle; they are the safest and last the longest for a shrine and altar. There is no wrong color of candle for her, but white candles are my favorite for working with Mama Moses.
- The conjure symbol for the spirits of the U.G.R.R. This can be on paper, in a frame, or drawn out on a surface within the shrine.
- A Bible. Mama Moses was immersed in Christianity. Whether you consider her Evangelical, Methodist, or Presbyterian, she was devout and drew inspiration in particular from the Old Testament.
- A Christian cross. Again Christianity was foundational to her spirituality; it is something that will please her spirit and show you understand and respect her devotion.
- African carvings, statues, or masks of Ghanaian and Ashanti origin if possible. Nana Tubman also practiced African cultural traditions and is a Queen Mother.

- An image of the “Freedom Seeker.” This can be on paper, in a frame, or drawn out on a surface within the shrine.
- Earth or rocks/pebbles from any of the many locations, statues, and plaques connected to the U.G.R.R. across North America.
- A gourd. She was reputed to carry a gourd-like pouch that contained roots, herbs, and other curios or “charms.” Any dried hollow gourd would be good, potentially filled with herbs, roots, and whatever else may speak to you as you work with her.
- A small jar of river, swamp, lake, or marsh waters that were part of the U.G.R.R.
- High John, Dixie John, or Chewin’ John root. (We’ll learn more about these plants in the chapter on High John the Conqueror.)
- Healing, medicinal, or magical herbs. These could be bay leaves, wormwood, or devil’s shoestring
- Railway spikes
- Photos of any of her U.G.R.R. colleagues and fellow warriors. Some examples would be John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Thomas Garrett, and William Still.
- A lantern. It can be a small one, either candle or battery lit.
- Images and symbols from the “Freedom Quilts.” (See the later chapter on The Quilt Codes of Freedom for more about these.)
- A toy gun. Some of us do include replicas or toy guns on her shrine. She carried a revolver for much of her conductor days, as well as brandished a musket during the Civil War. It’s a tool that brought her safety and protection, and she was a warrior.