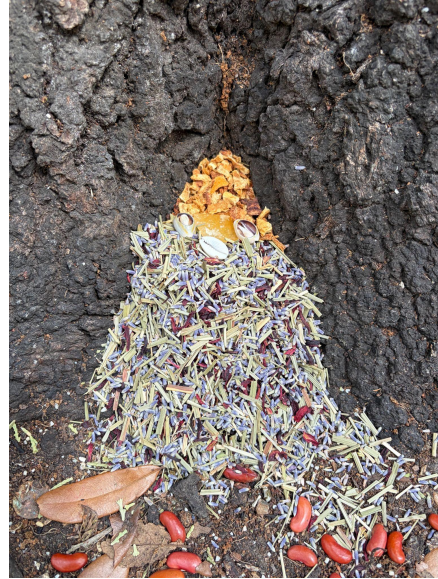




The Egun Tree and the Origins of Jazz

On April 16, 2026, the day before the New Orleans Poetry Festival, I went to make an offering at the Egun tree in Congo Square. The Egun tree is a space dedicated to the reverence of the ancestors of place and is associated with the origins of jazz and blues music because Africans during slavery were permitted to gather here and sing and play music on Sundays. The tree is a physical altar, where people leave offerings at the base to honor the ancestors. Appropriate offerings are biodegradable, usually things like a bit of alcohol, fruit, beans, cowrie shells, crystals, etc.

I am not from NOLA, but have a family connection. When my people left Connaught, Ireland during the starvation ("famine") they got on a boat leaving Sligo Bay, two parents and four children. The parents both died on board. The four boys, aged 10 thru 16 landed in Philadelphia with no parents. The two eldest stayed in Philadelphia, the two youngest went to New Orleans.

Most people who left Ireland at that time left from Connaught, due to the rocky, unfarmable land. "To hell or Connaught" was the ultimatum during Cromwell's conquest of Ireland. Being sent to Connaught meant being sent to starve. Cromwell's regime forced Irish Catholic landowners to abandon their land and relocate to the barren, rocky region of Connacht on pain of death. Being sent to Connaught was essentially being sent to hell.

I wanted to thank the ancestors of place there for their perseverance and the music, and also make any necessary apologies from my own ancestors. Apologies because, while I don't know my people in NOLA, I do know they are there, and there's always the possibility that, like so many Irish-Americans, at any point in history they may have got pulled into racism and Trumpstastic stupidity.

I spent the day of April 16 wandering around NOLA conjure shops, talking to people about what I could offer. By the day's end, I'd acquired a mix of herbs: lavender, holy basil (tulsi), cleavers, meadowsweet, violet leaf, dried orange peel, and stevia, plus some cowrie shells and a small orange rock. I put the offering down in the crevice of a tree, which seems to be how it's done, and I sang an old song from Connaught, "The Rocks of Bawn," about the hell of being forced to work plowing the land there, basically impossible.

Attached is a [recording](#) of me singing the song, recorded on May 17, 2026 for Collective Task.