

Can Blue Ward off the Goblins?



Enslaved Africans in South Carolina and Georgia's low country began the custom of painting houses and window frames with blue indigo. But they didn't do it to ward off evil spirits. Those early Africans used color for more than decoration; they believed color influenced life's ebb and flow. Blue, for example, was symbolic of spiritual sanctity, good fortune, calmness, confidence and affection. Enslaved in a strange land, perhaps the people turned to the belief that blue would bring spiritual calmness into their lives.

But as the centuries passed, the color's symbolic meaning gradually changed. No one knows for certain when the Gullahs and Geechees, descendants of those early Africans, began painting their houses blue in order to ward off ghosts, demons, and imps. Legend has it that the blue paint tricked evil spirits into thinking that the blue color was water; and because haints couldn't cross water, they couldn't enter the house. The color came to be known as Haint Blue. The Gullahs were especially wary of one evil spirit—the Boo Hag, a red, skinless creature who stole a sleeping person's skin in order to survive.



Today's Gullahs and Geechees paint their houses according to local custom rather than protection from roving Boo Hags. Still, many modern Gullah often say good night to each other by cautioning, "Don't let the Boo Hag ride you!"



Eventually the custom of painting houses blue spread from Gullah settlements to white neighborhoods, especially in Charleston and Savannah. Many Southerners now paint their doors, shutters, ceilings, window frames, porch ceilings and/or houses blue simply because their grandmothers and great-grandmothers had done so; because southern porches have *always* been blue; and because it's a pretty color.

Sherman Williams even has a special *Haint Blue* line, naming the colors Pool Blue, Palladian Blue, and Atmospheric Blue Allure. Interior decorators, interviewed for a Washington Post article, praised *Haint Blue* for "bringing the outdoors in" and "adding softness and interest" to a nice décor. But no mention of Haint Blue's Gullah origins appeared in the article. It's easy to paint doors and ceilings blue, but much harder to accept the blending of clashing cultures.

Can blue ward off the goblins? I can't say for sure, but just to be safe, my bedroom walls are painted a soft, soothing blue.