

## Witch Queens, Voodoo Spirits, and Hoodoo Saints: A Guide to Magical New Orleans

**Denise Alvarado**

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*Witch Queens, Voodoo Spirits & Hoodoo Saints* is an enlightening look at those who shaped the unique culture of New Orleans.

Each chapter covers an important figure in the history of New Orleans. These include people from history, like Voodoo practitioner and herbalist Marie Laveau and priestess Betsy Toledano, and others who are more legend than reality, like Annie Christmas. Saints and spirits, including Papa Legba and Baron Samedi, are also covered. Drawing on oral histories, books, and newspaper articles, the book includes as many verifiable details as possible while also exploring the myths that surround its subjects and what makes them meaningful.

Voodoo is the predominant religious system in the book, but it is not the only one. Catholicism was and is an important influence on spiritualism in New Orleans, which is evident throughout. Chaos magic is mentioned, and modern witchcraft comes into the mix. Alvarado's personal spiritual explorations have a significant influence, too; she writes of meeting and learning from contemporary occultist and high priestess Mary Oneida Toups, whose coven was recognized as an official religious organization. Thus, Alvarado is able to provide a clear view of spiritual practices that are often considered mysterious.

Denise Alvarado's book is fascinating as it examines New Orleans' rich spiritual landscape—a place where magic still thrives.

CATHERINE THURESON (March / April 2022)

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