

A.C. Wise, [Women to Read: Where to Start: July 2017](#)

<http://www.acwise.net/?tag=carolyn-morrow-long>

[A New Orleans Voodoo Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau](#) is another book I picked up on a whim, and it's my recommended starting point for **Carolyn Morrow Long**, who specializes in books dealing with religion, spirituality, and the history of New Orleans. In contrast with Tracy Beach's writing, Long's accounting of the life of Marie Laveau is often very dry. Rather than a narrative style, her writing reveals her research process, presenting legends and rumors about the famed Voodoo Queen, and laying out the meticulously-researched evidence to support or refute those stories. Reading through the book is almost like watching a detective at work, as Long digs through old birth records, baptism certificates, marriage announcements, property records, newspaper articles, and more. Like Beach, Long refers to interviews with those connected to Marie Laveau, and does her best to reconstruct a life largely lost to myth and sensationalism. The ultimate conclusion of Long's research is that some details may forever be unknown. One of the most fascinating things about the book is that it reveals how easily truth can be lost under layers of imperfect memory and incomplete record keeping. The amount Long is able to reconstruct is amazing when you see her sources and methods laid out. During Laveau's time in New Orleans, everyone seemed to be known by at least ten different names, and the spelling of those names was highly inconsistent. Long's dry style actually helps in reclaiming Laveau from the sensational legends that have grown up around her since her death, and even within her own lifetime. Long reminds us that there was a real woman behind the stories, one with a family and deep ties to her community. Long also gives readers a glimpse into the unique history of New Orleans, its racial politics, and its blend and clash of cultures. The thoroughness of Long's research and the precise way she lays it out makes this an excellent starting place for her work, and has me wanting to read her other titles.