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English 210

Dr. Magee

Marie Laveau

Marie Laveau, daughter of Charles Laveau and Marguerite Darcantrel, was born a free woman of color in New Orleans in 1794, but no one is sure as to the exact date she was born. Today, she is known as the most famous voodoo queen in the United States. In 1819, she married a free man of color, Jacques Paris. Soon after the two married, he mysteriously disappeared. Some people say he passed away, and some people say he returned to his homeland of Saint Dominique. Regardless of the truth, Marie Laveau filed a death certificate for her husband in 1824, and she started working as a hair dresser to the upper class women of New Orleans. In 1826, Laveau began a common law marriage to Louis Christopher Duminy de Clapion until he passed away in 1855. They were rumored to have fifteen children, and of the fifteen children she had a daughter that is known as Marie Laveau II. Her daughter was the key to her mysteriously “immortal” life.

When Marie Laveau I was working as a hair dresser, the wealthy women around her confided all of their “dirty little secrets” to her, which helped Laveau grow her reputation as a “psychic.” She was “psychic” to everyone around because of her knowledge of political affairs, crimes, and everyone’s secrets. It is also believed that she had the servants in aristocrat homes spy on the wealthy to gain further knowledge about what was happening in the city.

As her reputation grew, Laveau began to hold voodoo services in Congo Square, the meeting place for voodoo worshipers. However, surprisingly, Laveau was a devout Catholic in her personal life and attended Mass every day. Alongside Pere Antoine, the chaplain at St. Louis Cathedral, she nursed the sick people of New Orleans as well as prisoners condemned to death row. Laveau became so valued by the chaplain that he even allowed her to hold voodoo services in St. Louis Catholic Church. Though Laveau made her money by taking advantage of the rich, charging the socialites to tell their futures, casting spells for love or to steer certain events to go her clients’ way, she never charged the poor for nursing them to health.

Laveau I’s knowledge, connections, and spies allowed her to control New Orleans. Her influence on the politicians and aristocrats allowed her make the people of New Orleans believe in magic. For example, in the 1830’s, a young man of wealth was charged for rape. The man was most likely going to be convicted, so the night before the trial began, he begged Laveau for help to cast a spell for the case to be dismissed. Laveau put gris-gris, a bag of herbs supposedly filled with magic, all over New Orleans with notes that said the man was innocent. The next day, the case was dismissed. While this act of intimidation made everyone believe she had magic powers, the more accurate explanation would be her extensive base of knowledge throughout the city. She knew secrets about the judge and jury holding the trial which influenced the proceedings.

As Laveau I began to age, her daughter began to assume her mother’s responsibilities as Voodoo Queen and caregiver. The mother and daughter looked extremely alike, and their mannerisms were so similar that they were able to fool all of the people of New Orleans into thinking that Marie Laveau was immortal and did not age. Marie Laveau I died in 1881, and to this day, many people of New Orleans believe she still haunts New Orleans to extend her reign as Voodoo Queen.

Sources

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