

An Initial Interpretation of 2010 Ethnic and Racial Geographies in Greater New Orleans

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The follow observations were drawn from a geographical inspection of the 2010 census tract data on race and ethnicity for greater New Orleans, recently released by the U.S. Census Bureau. Please note the following:

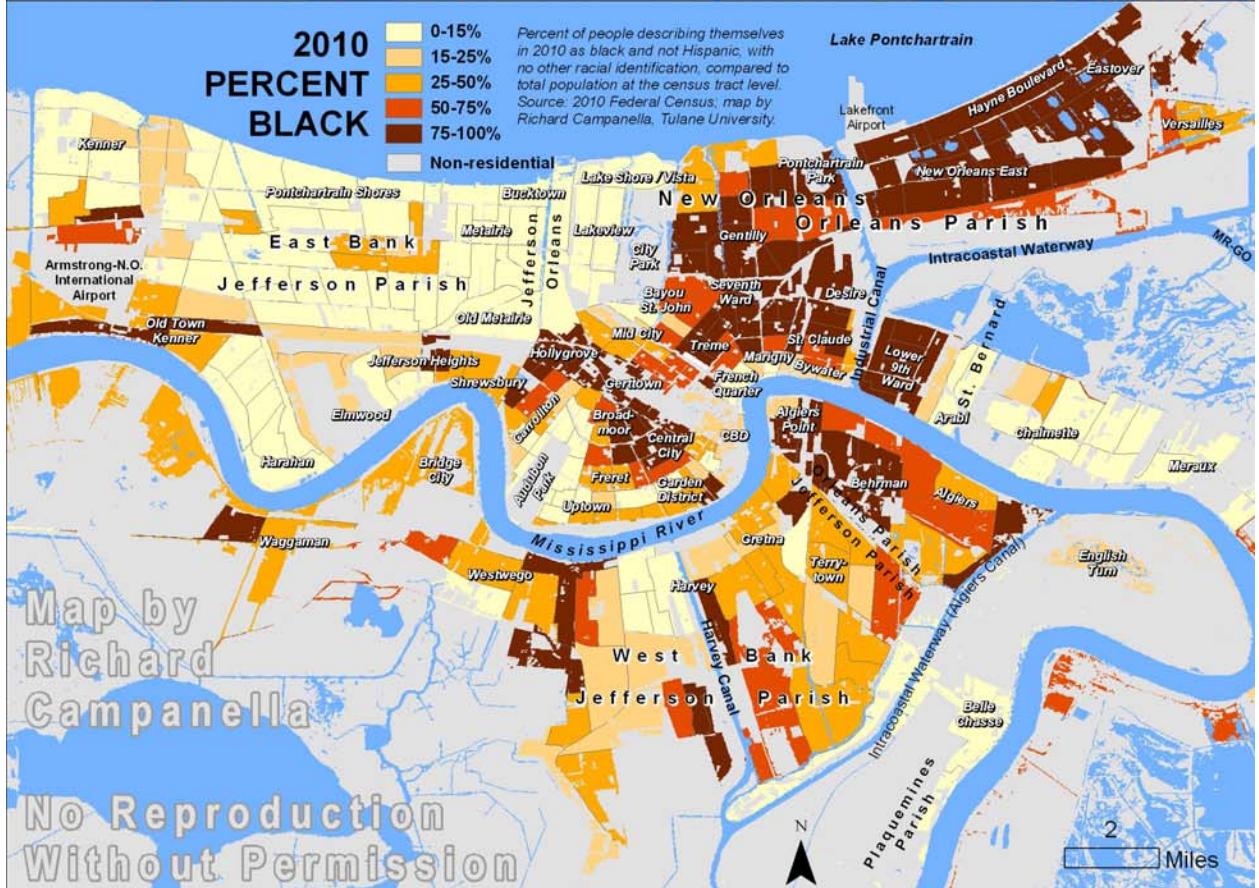
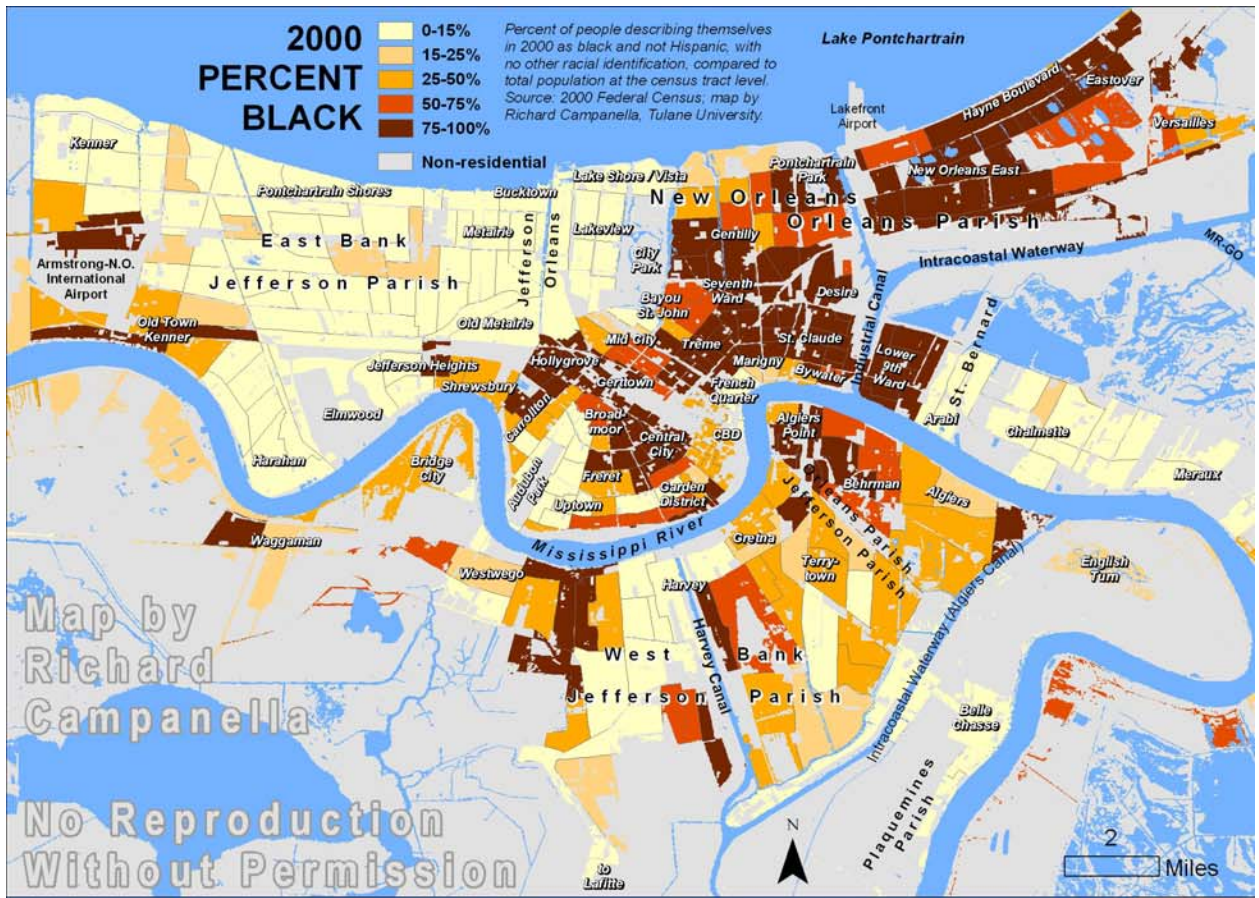
- *All cited figures for various racial and ethnic groups indicate those people who selected only one racial identity in their response to the census. The vast majority of respondents fell into this category.*
- *Hispanicism is viewed by the Census Bureau as an ethnicity independent of race; thus, the Hispanics discussed below are enumerated regardless of race, while all references to whites, blacks, and Asians imply that these respondents are not of Hispanic ethnicity.*
- *All maps in this study show demographic data at the census tract level. However, I masked out non-residential areas (in gray) using a variety of overlays, so that demographic data are only shown for where people actually reside.*
- *This study presumes an understanding of New Orleans' historical ethnic and racial geographies. For background reading on this topic, please see these and other sources: Campanella, R. *Bienville's Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans*. University of Louisiana Press, Lafayette, 2008 <http://richcampanella.com> ; Campanella, R. *Geographies of New Orleans: Urban Fabrics Before the Storm*. University of Louisiana Press, Lafayette, 2006 <http://richcampanella.com> ; Campanella, R. "An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 94, No. 3, December 2007, pp. 704-716. <http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/projects/katrina/Campanella.html>*
- *Please cite this study as follows: Richard Campanella, "An Initial Interpretation of 2010 Ethnic and Racial Geographies in Greater New Orleans," unpublished study, 2011, <http://richcampanella.com>*

Racial Patterns in Metro New Orleans, 2000-2010

New Orleans census tracts that had large African-American populations in 2000 overwhelmingly had fewer members of that population in 2010. More often than not, the reductions are massive. Explanations and discussion of the decline are provided below:

(1) **Katrina** The Katrina flood of August-September 2005 accounts for most of the decline in places like Hollygrove, Gerttown, greater Gentilly, eastern New Orleans, and the Lower Ninth Ward. Pontchartrain Park's 44% African-American population decline (2571 to 1440) is typical of census tracts in the flooded region. The rear-most tract of the Lower Ninth Ward is an extreme example, having lost 90 percent of its black population (2952 to 305). Paradoxically, while much of greater Gentilly and eastern New Orleans lost large numbers of African Americans in absolute numbers, they simultaneously became more African American in a relative sense, because the few whites who lived in those areas departed in even greater numbers than their black neighbors did.

(2) **Housing Projects** The demolition and ongoing reconstruction of the public housing projects accounts for another portion of black numerical decline, although this is poised to reverse partially as new housing units are completed. Tracts within the St. Bernard Housing footprint, for example, declined 86% from a population of 6248 in 2000 to 882 in April 2010. Even the census tract overlaying the River Garden (former St. Thomas) complex, which had already passed through the demolition-reconstruction cycle, lost 40 percent of its black population, from 2808 to 1674.



(3) **Gentrification** We also see black declines in majority-black tracts that neither flooded (or flooded only lightly) nor hosted public housing. Many of these tracts saw parallel increases in the white population, such as around Riverbend in Carrollton, between Magazine and Tchoupitoulas throughout uptown, in Treme, St. Roch, and along St. Claude Avenue. To the extent that this demographic transition represents gentrification (it should be noted that many of these incoming whites, while educated, are hardly “gentry,” and that many blacks may have left for reasons other than getting priced out of the real estate market), it replicates gentrification processes seen locally and nationally for decades. Gentrification usually occurs in situations where majority-nonwhite neighborhoods with lower incomes and historical housing stock physically abut areas that are wealthier, whiter, and/or already gentrified. In New Orleans, the wealthier, majority-white historical areas form a teapot-shaped pattern stretching from Carrollton to Bywater, with a broad “kettle” around the Audubon / Universities / Carrollton area and a narrow “spout” wending along the St. Charles-Magazine corridor through the CBD, French Quarter, and Marigny, and terminating in Bywater at the Industrial Canal. This area, which I have dubbed “the White Teapot” in my research,¹ comprises only 10 percent of New Orleans’ human-occupied footprint, but housed 42 percent of the city’s white population (58,000 out of 136,000) in 2000.

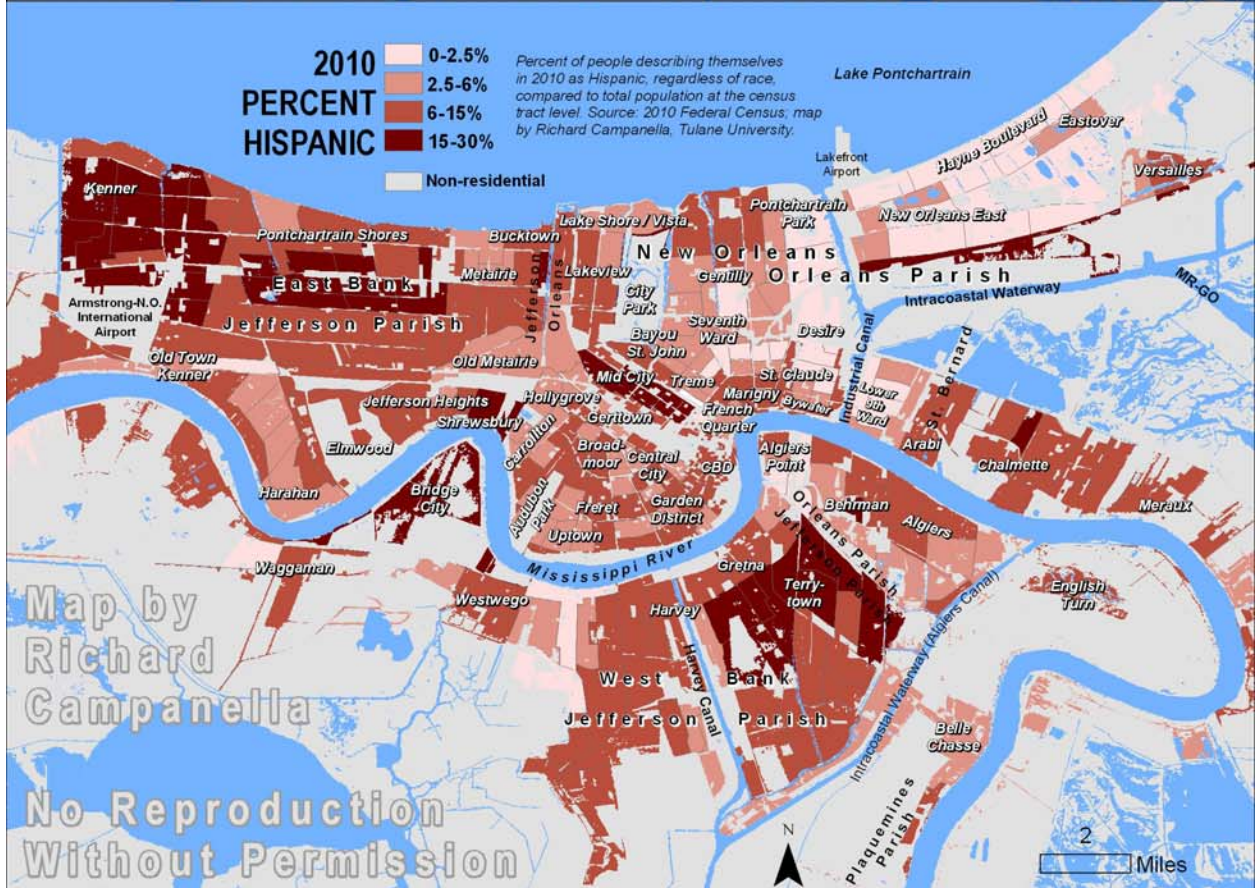
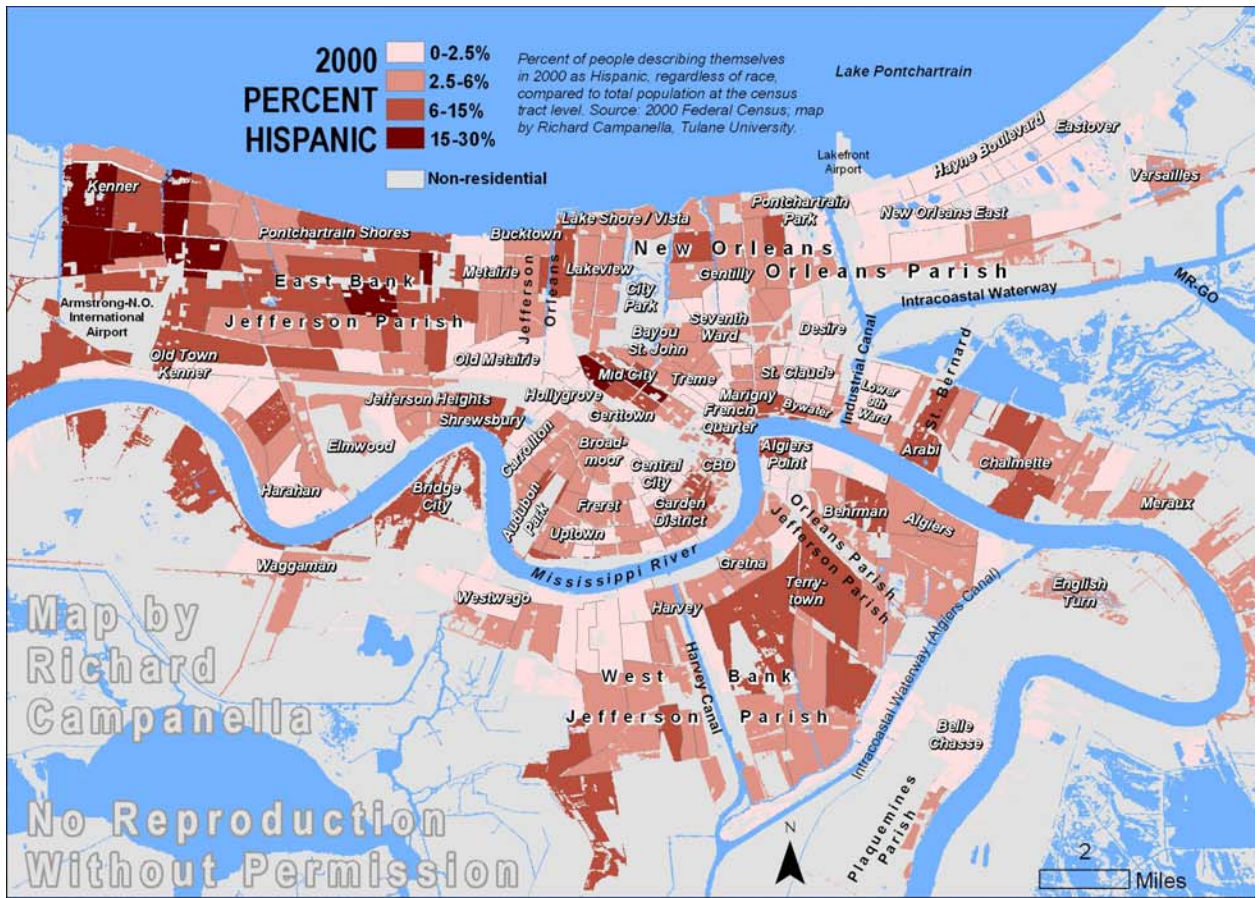
We should expect to see gentrification expanding from the White Teapot into adjacent areas and enveloping internal enclaves, and Census 2010 data confirm it: Every single tract between Magazine and Tchoupitoulas (Riverside, Irish Channel and Lower Garden District riverfront) has seen increased white and decreased black populations, some of them dramatic. This is also the case for the historical pockets of black settlement *within* the White Teapot, such as along Coliseum Street around the Valence intersection, and along Burdette and Adams streets. Census tracts that started gentrifying in the 1980s and 1990s, such as those in the heart of Marigny and Bywater, accelerated that process in the 2000s, having lost half to three-quarters of their black populations.

Ironically, among the few census tracts that saw significant relative gains in black populations were in heavily flooded majority-white Lakeview. West End, for example, saw its 2000-2010 black population increase from 68 to 347, while other Lakeview tracts had relative increases from 25% to 886%, but from tiny initial populations. Other areas of increased black population include the Aurora and Brechtel areas of Algiers and the unflooded Lakefront neighborhoods.

Hispanic Patterns

Historically, the Hispanic population in metro New Orleans generally did not cluster in dense enclaves, but rather in broad low-density concentrations mostly in the suburbs. By 2000 those areas included Mid City, around the Veterans / Causeway area of Metairie, in Terrytown on the West Bank, and in the northern half of Kenner (parts of which were dubbed “Little Honduras”). All four of those concentrations have increased in both absolute and relative numbers, and expanded in spatial extent. The Mid-City concentration has grown along the Canal / Tulane Avenue corridor; the Metairie concentration has increased from two to nine census tracts in which Hispanics comprise at least 15 percent of the population; Terrytown has expanded toward Harvey; and northern Kenner has gone from five to twelve tracts greater than 15 percent Hispanic. Each of these areas have developed visibly Hispanic / Spanish-speaking streetscapes and commercial scenes, with Latino grocery stores, bakeries, restaurants, and services catering to this community. None of them, however, is overwhelmingly Hispanic.

¹ See *Bienville’s Dilemma* and *Geographies of New Orleans* for more information.



While Hispanics were likely to have white non-Hispanic neighbors before Katrina, by 2010 we see more Hispanics moving into majority African American areas, particularly those that flooded. Perhaps the best example is the Chef Menteur Highway tract in eastern New Orleans, which went from 70 to 183 Hispanics, a 123 percent increase even as all other groups diminished by 41-66 percent. This may be a product of new lower-cost housing opportunities opening up as flooded homes were repaired, conveniently located in a region where recovery-related construction jobs abounded.

Region-wide, dozens of tracts throughout the suburban and rural periphery increased their Hispanic proportion from 0-2.5 percent to over 5 percent. Lower-cost housing within commuting distance to metro-area jobs, many of them relating to the recovery, partially explains this pattern.

St. Bernard's census tracts exhibit a mixture of those that gained and lost people of Hispanic ethnicity. These probably include a fair number of deep-rooted local people of Isleno ancestry. The eroding and heavily Katrina-damaged tract that covers rural eastern St. Bernard Parish lost 75 percent of its Hispanics, 78 percent of its non-Hispanic whites, and 47 percent of its black residents.

Asian Patterns

The premier enclave of people of Asian ancestry in greater New Orleans is the predominantly Vietnamese neighborhood of Versailles of eastern New Orleans, which has lost some of its population over the past decade but remains the highest concentration. The more scattered West Bank Asian population has formed a new concentration in the Woodmere and Timberlane sections of Harvey and Gretna. The lakeside subdivisions of East Jefferson has also received more Asian residents, and is probably more Chinese than those tracts of Versailles and the West Bank.

Population Shifts Along the I-10 Corridor

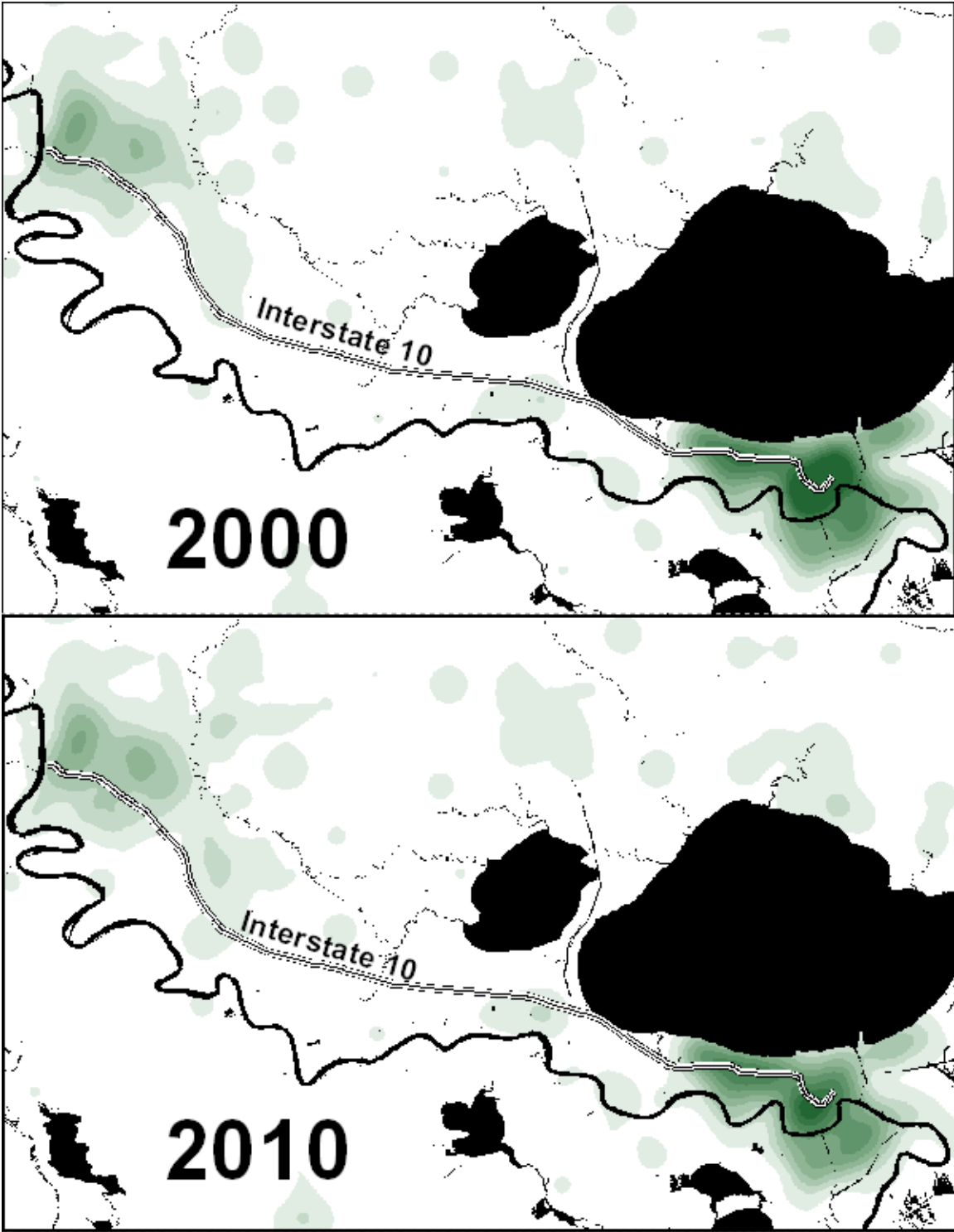
Anyone who has driven I-10 westward consistently over the past few decades has noticed that greater Baton Rouge has been expanding stridently toward New Orleans. In the 1980s, College Drive marked the capital city's suburban periphery; in the 1990s, it moved east of Bluebonnet, and today it is enveloping the Highland / Perkins area, whose census tracts have nearly doubled their populations in a decade. Gonzales is increasingly conflating with the Baton Rouge metropolitan area.

At the opposite end of the I-10 corridor, new subdivisions in the river parishes have drawn populations out of the metro New Orleans core, which of course suffered dramatic Katrina-related population declines in its eastern half.

Census data shed light on how Louisianians are distributing themselves along the I-10 corridor. Ten years ago, 1,537,366 people lived within ten miles of I-10 from downtown New Orleans to downtown Baton Rouge, a linear distance of 80 miles. The fulcrum—that is, the geographical center of balance—of that population was around Clearview Parkway in Metairie. Roughly 769,000 people lived between Clearview and the eastern edges of New Orleans, and the other 769,000 lived from Clearview westward all the way to downtown Baton Rouge.

In 2010, that population had dropped to 1,423,015. Because most of the growth occurred closer to Baton Rouge and nearly all decline occurred at the New Orleans end, the I-10 population fulcrum shifted four miles westward, to around Williams Drive in Kenner. While this move may not seem like a lot in absolute distance, it must be remembered that it takes a lot to relocate a population's fulcrum, and a 5-percent shift (four miles out of 80) actually represents a significant change. Greater New Orleans still boasts the heavier end of this population barbell,

but current trends indicate that a steady movement inland will continue. A similar shift is occurring between the south and north shores of Lake Pontchartrain.



Population shifts along the I-10 corridor between 2000 and 2010. Darker green shades indicate higher populations. Analysis and map by Richard Campanella.