

# *The Journal of* **SOUTHERN HISTORY**

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*Time and Place in New Orleans: Past Geographies in the Present Day.* By Richard Campanella. (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, 2002. Pp. 204. \$45.00, ISBN 1-56554-991-0.)

*Time and Place in New Orleans* has the distinct appearance of a coffee-table book: an oversized format with hundreds of images, many of them in

color. But this is not the type of book that can be casually scanned over snacks. The type is small, and the text, rather than the bland descriptive blurbs found in many coffee-table books, is detailed and analytical. The numerous photographs are more a collage of snapshots rather than expansive professional shots. Richard Campanella previously coauthored a "truer" coffee-table book in *New Orleans Then and Now* (Gretna, La., 1999), which seems to have served as the genesis of this more academic volume.

Although his new book requires close reading, those who do so will be amply rewarded. Campanella provides a thorough "historical geography" of New Orleans (p. 11) that describes how the physical setting of this three-hundred-year-old city shaped its development and its diverse population. He clearly states that this work "is a synthesis of secondary and primary historical data . . . infused with descriptive and quantified geographical information and interpretations" (p. 12). Nevertheless, as the most extensive geographical description of the city to date, Campanella's book fills a great need.

The book is divided into three main sections: "Situation," "Topography," and "Culture." Each section makes a contribution to the whole. In the first section Campanella provides a general description of the area, which he examines with particular attention to aspects of early French settlement (such as other potential sites considered as centers for French Louisiana). In "Topography" (which is double the length of the first section), he clearly explains how physical attributes of the city's location (for example, much of it being below sea level) shaped settlement and other patterns. Human intervention in the natural landscape by means of levees, drainage, and canals altered the constrictions placed upon growth.

The third section, "Culture," is longest of all: it covers the interaction of diverse human elements of the city in relation to their urban landscape. After providing one of the better discussions of the amorphous term *Creole* (pp. 115-17), Campanella presents a detailed history of several city districts, especially the cotton district, the sugar district, and "Newspaper Row." Campanella then borrows concepts from Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960) and applies them to New Orleans in his discussion of "nodes" and "landmarks." His subsection on "nodes" delineates essential places that reflect "the nexus of the exterior world beyond the Gulf of Mexico with the interior world of the Mississippi River and the basin it drains" (p. 158), and the discussion of landmarks provides a visual tour of eight neighborhoods of the city.

Despite its overall excellence, there are some flaws in the work. The text is occasionally repetitious; for example, the reader is informed three times on a single page that the building at 111 Rue Iberville was a restoration of the American Sugar Refining Company (p. 144). The antebellum period gets less attention than it deserves. Campanella also makes highly personal aesthetic judgments at times. Finally, as so many others have, the author has fallen in love with New Orleans. Those who share his intimacy with the city will resonate to his allusions to familiar places and businesses, but despite the book's numerous maps and photographs, those viewing from afar might get lost. Still, anyone who has an interest in the distinctive city of New Orleans must have this book.