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Review Essay: Searching for the City in the Past: The Many Histories of New Orleans

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Searching for the City in the Past

The Many Histories of New Orleans

Campanella, R. (2006). *Geographies of New Orleans*. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, pp. vii, 433, illustrations, tables, bibliography, index, \$49.50 hardcover.

Castellanos, H. C. (2006). *New Orleans as It Was: Episodes of Louisiana Life*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, pp. xx, 368, illustrations, catalogue of articles, index, \$21.95 paper.

Desdunes, R. L. (McCants, S. D. O., Trans. and Ed.). (2001). *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, pp. xxviii, 153, illustrations, index, \$14.95 paperback.

Dessens, N. (2007). *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, pp. xiv, 257, illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index, \$65.00 cloth.

LaBarre, D. (Ed.). (2007). *The New Orleans of Lafcadio Hearn: Illustrated Sketches from the Daily City Item*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, pp. 1, 175, introductions with notes, illustrations, notes, bibliography, \$24.95 cloth.

Laborde, P. S., and Magill, J. (2006). *Canal Street: New Orleans' Great Wide Way*. Gretna, LA: Pelican, pp. 240, photographs, bibliography, index, \$35.00.

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New Orleans has always inspired stories about its past that have earned it a place in both popular culture and the imagination as a mysterious city of decadence and decay, romance and myth. In the past few decades, an increasing number of scholars have also turned their attention to the city's history. While helping to untangle the past from the mythic narratives used to memorialize the city's history, these studies also highlight the distinctive sense of place created by its diverse inhabitants and by its geographic location. Fascination with New Orleans grew in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, as people around the country sought to understand how the city's past gave rise to the circumstances of the present. The books under review represent the diverse array of new publications and reprinted texts now available to those seeking to satisfy this interest. Although very different in scope, time frame, and subject, they all provide readers with a glimpse into the forces that shaped both past and present in the city.

Just as contemporary battles over the future of New Orleans reflect efforts of different groups to claim and reclaim the city, some writers claim ownership of its past. What authors reveal and obscure, however, often depends on their own relationship to the city and its history. As Judith Kelleher Schafer remarks in the introduction to the reprint edition of Henry C. Castellanos's *New Orleans as It Was*, his "vignettes are as remarkable for the aspects of New Orleans life that he omitted as much as for what he included" (p. xii). For Castellanos, a white, male lawyer coming to terms with a present in the 1890s that he could no longer reconcile with the past, telling his stories was a means of recapturing the "startling, romantic and improbable" truths that shaped life in New Orleans prior to the Civil War. In contrast to Schafer's insight, Castellanos believed he "omitted none of the salient

episodes which constitute the charm of this unique metropolis of the South" (preface). Understanding what Castellanos and others ignored about the past can be as important as understanding what they revealed. Each book under review illuminates multiple voices of New Orleans's many pasts, even as it silences others, and they thereby underscore the need for a fuller understanding of the city and its diverse inhabitants.

All of the books under review define New Orleans as unique, a practice that has often led to its exclusion from the larger narrative of urban history. New Orleans and other southern cities have long been neglected by both historians of the South, who rest their arguments of southern distinctiveness on the plantation system and its rural traditions. Historians of urban America until recently tended to focus primarily on the northeast. Furthermore, just as theories of southern exceptionalism perpetuate notions of difference between North and South, so too do they lead to an assumption of southern urban exceptionalism.¹ The inclusion of New Orleans into the larger narrative of urban America is further complicated by debates in the historiography over when, or if, it became an "American" city. Some scholars have pointed to significant events in the nineteenth century when the city's inhabitants put aside ethnic and racial differences and united around their allegiance to the nation. Others, such as Joseph Roach, have suggested that the process of Anglification and Africanization experienced by the city's Latin Creoles "continues to be reenacted in the streets."² A distinct sense of place did emerge in New Orleans as the city's residents appropriated, transformed, and revitalized one another's traditions and customs. For much of its past, New Orleans was a borderland, drawing inspiration from regional, national, and international influences. Renewed attention to this complex and rich history has grown in the past decade, as scholars attempt to redress its exclusion from the larger narrative of urban history while underscoring its distinctive past.

The books under review offer tremendously diverse perspectives of New Orleans. The original publication dates span over one hundred years, from 1880 and the publication of Hearn's articles in the press to 2007 and the publication of Dessens's monograph. They also differ dramatically in scope. While Hearn ruminates on city life during a seven-month period in 1880, Campanella offers a sweeping analysis of the city's geographic and demographic patterns of development from the prehistoric period to the present. Each, moreover, provides a particular frame of reference that reflects their context and their own relationship with the city. While Hearn exposed the corruption of the city for his contemporary readers in the 1880s, Castellanos invited them to look to the past, to the presumed halcyon days prior to the Civil War. Dessens and Desdunes similarly discuss the nineteenth century but focus on two groups of people, the Saint-Domingue refugees and the *gens de couleur libres* (free people of color), that are virtually ignored by both Hearn and Castellanos. Campanella and Laborde and Magill, finally, remind us that the spaces of New Orleans are as important to understanding its history and character as its people. Whereas Campanella provides an analysis of the entire city's geographic development, Laborde and Magill focus exclusively on one particular space in the city, Canal Street. Each book, nevertheless, proves valuable for both scholarly and popular audiences.

The information in Hearn and Castellanos first reached their audiences in the nineteenth century by way of the local newspapers. Lafcadio Hearn is most famous for his writings about Japan, where he spent the latter half of his life. In fact, he spent only ten years in New Orleans. Nevertheless, his pieces about the city helped to foster the mythical images of

decadence, corruption, and mystery that shaped the nation's perception of New Orleans in the late nineteenth century. These articles were published in local newspapers, including the *Times-Democrat* and the *Daily City Item*, as well as in national publications such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Scribner's Magazine*. The collection under review, *The New Orleans of Lafcadio Hearn*, focuses more narrowly on the editorial pieces and woodcut sketches that appeared in the *Daily City Item* from May 1880 to February 1881.

Hearn began the editorial and cartoon series to increase the readership of the *Daily City Item* and to promote a slate of politicians on the local and national level. He drew his creative inspiration, however, from matters both trivial and profound concerning life in New Orleans. Many of the editorials and woodcuts level particularly harsh indictments against the city government. They also expose instances of police brutality and corruption, problems with the sewage system and garbage collection, and concerns over the number of violent murders in the city. On the other hand, many of the pieces provide a window into the social world of the city, musing over the presence and impact of peddlers, flower sellers, sailors, beggars, milkmen, and other street characters. No subject was too absurd or refined for his comment. While a number of sketches bemoan the menace of bicyclists, others celebrate performances at the Opera House. An illuminating introduction of the pieces by Delia LaBarre helps the reader understand the impetus behind Hearn's unlikely choice of subjects and analyzes how he used satire to expose corruption and immorality while also offering a "balm" for his readers. Hearn's wit offered a poignant and humorous edge to his vignettes of everyday life in the city while simultaneously exposing the depravity of its residents and leaders.

Residents of New Orleans would have recognized the characters that Hearn captured in his engravings and who filled and enlivened the streets. For the contemporary reader to discern the historical context of the articles, the last section of the book provides short explanations of the situations and people Hearn described. In many instances, these notes provide sufficient information on the subject and citations for further research. In other cases, only cursory explanations are offered. In "Extracht from the Spach ov Paddy Whack," Hearn depicted a caricatured Irishman who could presumably be found begging for money and harassing the public in Exchange Alley at all hours of the day. LaBarre indicates that the image and accompanying speech was "portrayed simply to provide laughter and represent one of the characters typical of New Orleans streets" (p. xxii). The historical notes for this entry, however, indicate that an "Irish reader" wrote to the editors to "complain about this sketch, which the editor defended while praising the many Irish contributions to the city" (p. 136). Considering the ethnic and racial tensions that characterize the history of New Orleans, such vague explanations, without citations, cannot fully explicate how Hearn's work reflects the dynamics of power and representation. Hearn was an insightful, wry, and often compassionate observer of life in the city. His work, nevertheless, obscures as much as it reveals about the daily experiences and concerns of the city's residents. A more complete understanding of these incidents and characters remains to be uncovered by future historians interested in exploring daily life in the nineteenth-century city.

Fifteen years after Hearn left New Orleans, attorney, journalist, and New Orleans native Henry Castellanos began writing about the city. Whereas Hearn discussed the present, Castellanos turned to the romanticized past, describing "episodes" and characters in New Orleans that he recalled from the pre-Civil War era. First appearing in the New Orleans

Times-Democrat from 1892 to 1895, they were reprinted in a volume in 1895, ten months prior to Castellanos's death. Certain themes found in Hearn's work, nevertheless, recur in Castellanos's vignettes, notably discussions of both local leaders and unusual characters that populated the city. Having lived in New Orleans prior to the war, and having witnessed its transformation during Reconstruction, Castellanos reminisced about a political and social world that he believed ceased to exist. Only rarely in the narrative does Castellanos refer to his present and only then to note its failure to reflect the glory of the past. He remarks, for instance, that "those days were happier far than ours," when people mingling in the streets were "free from the intrusion of drunken hoodlums or Workhouse rowdies" (p. 146).

Castellanos covered a vast array of subjects in his narrative, including stories of duels, conditions of the prisons, notable architectural landmarks, controversies between Anglos and Creoles, slave conspiracies, and the role of Catholic priests. Schafer argues that Castellanos, unfettered by the dictates of a straight-forward narrative, offered "vignette after vignette bound together only loosely by the fact that they are all set in the Crescent City" (pp. xi-xii). While some chapters describe major leaders in the city, others provide information on little known figures. For example, a chapter about Denis Prieur, who served as mayor of New Orleans for ten years, is followed by a chapter on the fate of the slave Pauline, who was executed for abusing her mistress. Even within each chapter, Castellanos felt no compunction to maintain a focus on the subject matter. A reader beginning the chapter on Prieur finds Castellanos turning to a discussion of Jackson Square and the French Market and describing in detail the diversity of people who "commingled together and in incessant motion, offer[ing] the ever varying and dissolving views of the kaleidoscope" (p. 145). Some topics, furthermore, are completely ignored, including the ravaging effects of diseases such as yellow fever, the numerous holidays that punctuated the residents' calendars, and the presence of prostitutes and criminals in the city.

Castellanos also informs readers that he strove to recapture the days of slavery in an "unprejudiced and truthful language" (preface). The voices and trials of slaves, nevertheless, remain largely absent. In addition to his chapter on Pauline, he discusses the ill treatment of slaves by the infamous Madame Laurelie, the "dangerous and degrading influence" of Voudou, and the Congo Square dances and games of Racquette. He also muses over failed attempts by slaves to run away or rebel. In his nostalgic rendering of the past, however, Castellanos speaks of slavery only as a paternalistic and edifying institution that benefited everyone. Furthermore, he provides only brief mention of the free people of color, notably their willingness to help thwart a slave conspiracy and their bravery in the battle of New Orleans. This powerful yet often silenced group of people, however, is featured prominently in the narratives of both Desdunes and Dessens.

In his work documenting the history and legacy of Creoles of color, Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes notes that the "world easily forgets the things of the past" (p. 127). Writing about a decade later than Castellanos, Desdunes provides the history of a group of people ignored by his contemporary and overlooked by others. First published in 1911 as *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire* by a French press in Montreal, it was translated into English by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants in 1973 and published by Louisiana State University Press, who reissued the book in 2001. Because of a high rate of emancipation during the Spanish regime as well as the influx of refugees from Saint-Domingue, New Orleans had a large population of free people of color who managed to exert considerable economic and

cultural influence in the city. Desdunes's own history as a member of this group inspired him to memorialize those that many forgot. Although employed by the Custom House, Desdunes devoted his free moments to writing and activism, becoming a founding member of the *Comité des Citoyens*, or Citizens' Committee, the group responsible for initiating *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

Desdunes's appropriation of the word *Creole* reflects the pride he felt in his people's history and his unwillingness to allow others to rewrite the past. Although the word *Creole* was used in the antebellum period to denote anyone born in Louisiana, regardless of their race or their status as free or slave, by the late nineteenth century some Creoles of French and Spanish lineage claimed that it referred only to those of pure white descent. This creation of what scholar Joseph Tregle refers to as the "Creole myth" informed much of the work on Louisiana during the early twentieth century, including studies by Albert Fossier, Edward Larocque Tinker, and Desdunes's contemporary, Grace King.³ According to anthropologist Virginia Dominquez, "white families of French/Spanish descent or allegiance actively fought the publication of any book or article that referred to, or even implied, that there were people of color in Louisiana who called themselves Creoles."⁴ Desdunes addressed this issue of race, describing the precarious position free people of color occupied between whites and slaves. For Desdunes, his position as a black man was as significant as his French descent. He celebrated not only their cultural heritage, as exemplified in his discussions of French traditions, but also their racial dignity, as illustrated in the title of his chapter on philanthropy, "How the Black Man Knows How to Give." Desdunes not only appropriated the term *Creole* but also refused to concede their legacy to those who sought to silence their contributions.

Desdunes provides biographical sketches of notable Creoles of color who lived and worked in New Orleans during the nineteenth century. For example, he provides extensive information about the men who contributed poems to the 1845 book, *Les Cenelles*, as well as others who became artists, engravers, architects, doctors, and politicians. He also devotes considerable attention to men who served in the military, describing the bravery of Creole soldiers in the Battle of New Orleans and the Union soldiers who "burned with the desire to take up arms for the cause of freedom" (p. 124). A chapter on the charitable contributions of women involved in the Catholic Church, furthermore, illustrates their commitment to the city's poor and ill. Although his book is subtitled "Fifty Creole Portraits," Desdunes does not merely describe their accomplishments. Rather, he offers extensive documentary evidence about their communities, relationships with whites in New Orleans, and legacies.

Although Desdunes describes the common cause Creoles of color made with slaves, especially during the Civil War and Reconstruction, he does not avoid discussing the ambivalence many of them felt toward slavery. Creoles were often highly educated, many in Europe, and often felt a greater identification with white Creoles in the city than with slaves. According to Desdunes, the respect generated between Creoles of color and white Creoles broke down in the 1830s and 1840s with the arrival of Anglo-Americans and immigrants who rejected the older refined traditions and sought only to make a profit. These "newcomers," he believed, sought to "reduce our people to powerlessness" (p. 112). His history of the Creoles of color signifies the despair, humiliation, and discrimination they endured despite their refinement, skills, and accomplishments. He noted, for example, that when Norbert Rillieux, a scientist and inventor, passed away, the newspapers did not

mention his race, prompting Desdunes to remark that while they “pretended to sing his praises,” they “considered it important to deprive the Creoles of the glory they could have enjoyed from the illustrious contributions he rendered to society” (p. 74).

Since the publication of Desdunes book, scholars have continued to uncover the histories of groups that were marginalized from the larger narratives of urban history and the history New Orleans. Slaves, Irish and German immigrants, women, and free people of color have all been examined to more fully understand relationships of power in nineteenth-century urban life. Separating these groups from the larger urban fabric provides important insights into their particular experiences. Desdunes’s book fits within this pattern through its exclusive focus on Creoles of color. Desdunes, however, incorporates information on both free people of color born in Louisiana and those born in Martinique and Saint-Domingue, believing that they were “united under the same conditions” (p. 3). Nathalie Dessens, in *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans*, provides another layer to this social and cultural fabric by focusing exclusively on the refugees who fled Saint-Domingue for New Orleans. She agrees with Desdunes that these refugees shared a cultural and social affinity with the white Creoles and Creoles of color who welcomed them into the city. Dessens, however, wishes to underscore their separate contribution to the history of New Orleans. Indeed, she specifically cites Desdunes as contributing to the silencing of their distinct contributions.

According to historian Thomas Fiehrer, the history of the Saint-Domingue refugees has “remained buried until recently in the recesses of the collective unconscious” (quoted in Dessens, p. 2). Dessens begins her book by tracing the refugees’ travels from Saint-Domingue to Cuba, Jamaica, France, and New Orleans. For Dessens, the more than 15,000 refugees who migrated to New Orleans profoundly affected the political, economic, and cultural life of the city. The refugees numerically reinforced the number of French speakers and members of the Catholic Church and became active members in the political and social life of the city. They also greatly expanded the city’s economic and educational infrastructure. Culturally, they reinforced and at times strengthened practices that, according to Anglo-Americans in New Orleans, demoralized the city’s residents, including duels, gambling, Congo Square dances, and the institution of *plaçage*, the tradition of relationships between free women of color and white men.

Most important, perhaps, the refugees brought a distinct view of race, one that Dessens characterizes as more liberal than that of the city and of the southern region as a whole. In addition to providing more “independence” to their slaves, white refugees established close ties with free people of color in their families, in their residential patterns, and in their cultural and economic lives. According to Dessens, these ideas about race, combined with the refugees’ common geographical identification and experiences in Saint-Domingue, overrode their racial differences and made it possible to assess their experiences as a group. Place, in other words, predominated over race. By focusing on this “symbolic ethnicity,” she claims it is “not necessary to systematically separate the three racial groups that composed the Saint-Domingan community” (p. 63).

Dessens’s decision to treat the white and black refugees as one group provides important insights into their collective consciousness and contributions to the development of New Orleans. Her book reminds historians that while they often seek to distinguish groups from the whole to document their particular history, group consciousness can cross racial, ethnic, and gender lines. On the other hand, such an approach can fail to unravel the complexities of

experience. Slaves, who composed about one-half of the total number of refugees, came to Louisiana with their masters “whether of their own free will or under constraint” (p. 15). Dessens argues that this constraint did not diminish the “community of spirit originating from common background” (p. 63). Contemporaries, however, clearly distinguished slaves from the other refugees, found them threatening, and only allowed them to “enter the territory as a special favor to their unfortunate masters” (p. 43). The suspicions toward them did not decrease; when rumors of slave rebellions circulated in the city, most residents assumed the leaders were slaves from Saint-Domingue. Although Dessens discusses the impact of these fears, her structure does not provide for a more focused examination of the slave experience.

Dessens also indicates that the free people of color from Saint-Domingue “never attempted to fight for the liberation of the enslaved population” and that they “never opposed the system of slavery” (p. 123). Among many free people of color, this was indeed true, for some became slave owners and found it necessary to defend their own claims to independence and rights by distinguishing themselves from slaves. As Judith Schafer demonstrates, however, many free people of color, only recently freed themselves, purchased family members to protect them within the system. They also found common cause with slaves, albeit at times reluctantly, during the Civil War.⁵ Finally, Dessens asserts that “it is probably at Congo Square that the whole refugee community, slaves, free people of color, and whites met more often” and where the “refugees’ identity manifested” (pp. 49-50). The power relations enacted in this public spectacle of slaves dancing under the gaze of white masters, however, is not explored. Dessens is aware that her desire to uncover the history of these refugees does, at times, leave little room for the nuance required to uncover the unique position of slaves and free people of color within this larger group. Nevertheless, her extensive documentation of these refugees provides future researchers with the foundations on which to better understand their role in the history of New Orleans.

Although the proceeding books focus exclusively on the nineteenth century, *Canal Street: New Orleans’ Great Wide Way*, by Peggy Scott Laborde and John Magill, extends our understanding of New Orleans into the twentieth century by documenting the development of Canal Street, the widest business district street in the country. City officials never implemented plans to use the space to erect a canal connecting the Mississippi River to Lake Pontchartrain. Instead, the street became the epicenter of the city’s commercial district, with restaurants and clothing stores lining its streets and street cars bringing people from more remote areas of the city. Richly illustrated with photographs, the book provides a fascinating visual tour through the years of the street’s central place in the cultural, political, and economic history of New Orleans. Laborde and Magill explore standard topics, including those about stores, restaurants, and hotels. The authors also discuss certain places and spaces along the street, including the Custom House, the River End, and Mid-City. Other chapters are more surprising, such as one about the introduction of electricity along the street and another about the businesses that erected electric and then neon signs, making the street, in the words of the authors, a “Great Bright Way” (p. 93).

Geographical analyses of cities have become increasingly important for understanding the use of urban space and the ways in which people interacted with the built environment. *Canal Street*, nevertheless, does not provide everyone’s perspective of the street. African Americans, for example, are rarely visible on the Canal Street described in this book. Although chapters discuss the many shops and restaurants that dotted the street, the reader

is told that “one result of segregation was that blacks were less likely to shop on Canal Street” (p. 117). A sidebar offering the personal remembrances of former mayor Ernest “Dutch” Morial expounds on this point, noting that because of “rigid segregation . . . we couldn’t go to any of the restaurants” (p. 116). This information is relegated to a three-page chapter titled “Social Issues” devoted primarily to a discussion of the White League, which sought to limit the rights of African Americans during Reconstruction, and to the segregationist policies that ultimately led to their exclusion. The authors also devote a chapter to the use of Canal Street as a meeting place and specifically as a space of “protest or celebration” but limit their discussion to Armistice Day and V-J Day, missing an important opportunity to more thoroughly discuss the Civil Rights era protests that ended segregation along the street. The sit-ins at Woolworths and other dime stores are mentioned only as an afterthought in the introduction and in a sidebar in the chapter on social issues.

The authors do, however, discuss the alternative spaces erected to cater to African American consumers. For example, Krauss Company, located at the corner of Canal and Basin, welcomed black shoppers. The authors note that it also “proved to be a popular shopping spot for the ladies of the district,” a reference to the prostitutes in the adjacent Storyville neighborhood (p. 38). In another photographic caption, readers learn that the Loew’s State Theatre erected a separate entrance for black patrons not on Canal Street, but rather on Rampart Street. In the area past Rampart street, finally, patrons could visit numerous bars that featured “interracial bands at a time when it was illegal for black and white musicians to perform together” (p. 79).

Laborde and Magill provide an important contribution to our understanding of the spatial layout of Canal Street and the business growth it experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book reflects the increasing interest in the geographic and historical study of urban landscapes and the relationship between city space and community development. Nevertheless, an important opportunity was lost to further explore the interactions of people both on the street and in the businesses, restaurants, and shops. From its initial formation in the nineteenth century, Canal Street was a diverse and vibrant space. Throughout its history, even those excluded from patronizing certain establishments nevertheless labored in various capacities along the street and used it as a meeting place and conduit through the city. African Americans, immigrants, and others were not absent or invisible. This other side of Canal Street, equally significant in shaping relations both in the business establishments and streets, awaits further research.

Future scholars interested in the analysis of urban and cultural geography in New Orleans will be able to build from the study of Laborde and Magill. They will also become indebted to the work of Richard Campanella, the author of the final book under review. The most sweeping and comprehensive of the six, *Geographies of New Orleans: Urban Fabrics Before the Storm* explores the area that became New Orleans from the prehistoric period to the present, exploring how the physical geography of the area shaped the lives of the inhabitants and how, conversely, the inhabitants changed the physical environment. This beautifully arranged book, filled with color photographs, charts, and other images of the city, could be mistaken, on casual inspection, to be a mere coffee-table book. In fact, however, it is a richly researched and extensively documented study that provides a more inclusive view of the city’s diversity and offers important insights into the significance of geography in shaping the urban environment.

Campanella divides his book into sections that explore the physical environment, the built environment, and the demographic development of New Orleans. The first section, "Physical Geographies," includes chapters on the area's geological history, its pedological features, and its topography, incorporating information on the significance of the Mississippi River to the development of the area as well as the impact of human interference on the landscape. The text describes the changes over time, while the charts, drawings, photographs, and satellite images allow readers to visualize the physical transformations. Campanella begins the section by noting that while New Orleans is one of the oldest colonial cities in the nation, it "lies upon the youngest sizable earthen surface of North America" (p. 33). The author provides an excellent overview of why the city, situated in a space of "geographic destiny," became so imperiled by its physical and demographic alterations. In the second section, "Urban Geographies," Campanella explores the development of the built environment from its initial founding by the French to the present and provides detailed assessments of the historical architecture in the French Quarter and the development of uptown, downtown, and Elysian Fields. Campanella compares Creole and American styles of architecture, describes the peculiar spatial layout of the city, and highlights unique aspects of the city, such as the iron-lace galleries and balconies found in the French Quarter. In an unusual quantitative chapter titled "What the Yellow Pages Reveals about New Orleans," the author compares New Orleans with other metropolitan areas of the United States. While Campanella confirms many widely held opinions of the city, such as the number of bars it contains per capita, he also reveals that many myths about the city prove unfounded. The patrons of bars within the French Quarter partake in the sin and decadence expected of them, a self-fulfilling destiny that the "modern tourist industry enthusiastically exploits" (p. 173). Furthermore, while people around the world celebrate New Orleans's musical heritage and its accomplished musicians, the city lags far behind other urban centers in the United States in terms of supporting this talent.

In the third section Campanella considers the demographic diversity of the city, specifically whether it became the first "multicultural" society in the country. Considering the vast amount of information covered in the text, it is surprising that Campanella does not detail the contributions of the area's first inhabitants, the Native Americans. He does, nevertheless, analyze the impact of various ethnic groups from the colonial period to the present. Irish, German, Jewish, Greek, African American, Italian, Chinese, and Vietnamese communities are all represented in the chapters, as are the more documented Creoles and Anglo-Americans. In addition, Campanella provides an extended discussion of the controversy concerning the word *Creole* and an assessment of their numerical and geographical distribution throughout the city.

Campanella originally concluded the book with a chapter that explains how the fate of New Orleans is inextricably linked to its topography and geography and, more specifically, to the river, gulf, and wetlands surrounding the city. The words that begin this chapter, written before Hurricane Katrina forever altered the city, proved prophetic—"Ill advised it would be to attempt to predict the long-term future of a city like New Orleans" (p. 381). In the hurricane's aftermath, Campanella retained the information in this chapter but changed the title from "Future Geographies" to "Future Geographies That Never Were." He also added a chapter titled "Hurricane Katrina and the Geographies of Catastrophe" in which he recounts the physical and human suffering caused by the hurricane, punctuated

by harrowing excerpts from the author's own diary, written as he waited out the storm in his New Orleans home.

Campanella's book will appeal to both a general and scholarly audience. *Geographies of New Orleans* is not easily absorbed in one sitting. This is a book to be studied over time, shared with friends, and kept nearby as a reference (even on a coffee table). The images alone offer a compelling view of both the physical and built environments. Campanella offers new directions for study into the relationship between the geography of the city and its inhabitants, confirming that New Orleans's distinct past can be understood only by examining the varied cultural and spatial forces that shaped its history.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the nation created a collective narrative of New Orleans and embraced it as its own. On the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, an editorial writer in the *Chicago Tribune* quoted a scientist who stated that New Orleans "should never have been built there in the first place." In response, the editorial writer opined, "Now that we have a chance to correct the mistake, why repeat it."⁶ Just as the future of New Orleans depends of the power of certain groups to demand that their voices be heard (and that we listen), so too does the production of the city's past depend on the power of individuals and groups to assert their narrative. Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds us that the "past does not exist independently from the present."⁷ In a city whose history collides in an endless confrontation with the present and future, the authors represented here have staked their own claims to the city's many pasts. They remind us that narratives of the city can both illuminate and silence the voices of those who shaped its history. All the books inspire the reader to want more of New Orleans, both as it was (or how it could be otherwise) and as it may be in the future.

—Sandra M. Frink
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Notes

1. In the 1970s, David Goldfield called for historians to study southern urban centers with a regional focus. Although few took the lead in doing this, a number of scholars have offered comparative analyses of southern cities. These include Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (New York, 1964); Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (Urbana, 1978); Some of Goldfield's essays, revised and expanded, are collected in Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge, 1997). Most studies of urban centers in the south have focused on the twentieth century. Raymond Mohl laments the fact that case studies of groups, institutions, problems, and events have dominated the field of urban history rather than studies that focus on the link between city and region. Raymond A. Mohl, "City and Region: The Missing Dimension in U.S. Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* 25 (1998): 3-21. Kenneth Scherzer, in his review essay of recent southern urban histories, demonstrates that the issue of southern urban "exceptionalism" has not disappeared. Scherzer, "Southern Cities—How Exceptional?" *Journal of Urban History* 26 (2000): 692-706.

2. Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, 1996), 10. Historians of New Orleans disagree over when the city became "American," dating it to 1803 and the transfer of the territory to the United States, to 1815 and the Battle of New Orleans, to 1825 with the visit of the Marquis de Lafayette, to 1852, when Anglo-Americans in the city wrested political power from the Latin Creoles, and even to the 1857 celebration of Mardi Gras. See, for example, Robert V. Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans: Andrew Jackson and America's First Military Victory* (New York, 1999), 187-90; Joseph Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819* (Knoxville, 1999), xix; Patricia Brady, "Carnival of Liberty: Lafayette in Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 41 (2000): 23-40; Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "Creoles

and Americans,” in Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge, 1992), 173; James Gill, *Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, MS, 1997). The unique ethnic composition of New Orleans must be taken into consideration when discussing the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the city experienced the same forces of urbanization and immigration common to other large port cities in the United States. For a similar view, see Joseph Logsdon, “Immigration through the Port of New Orleans,” in Mark Stolarik, ed., *Forgotten Doors: The Other Ports of Entry to the United States* (Philadelphia, 1988), 105-8.

3. Tregle, “Creoles and Americans,” 131-88; also see, e.g., Albert Fossier, *New Orleans: The Glamour Period, 1800-1840* (1957; rpt., Gretna, LA, 1998); Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (New York, 1915).

4. Virginia Dominquez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick, 1986), 148.

5. Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans, 1846-1862* (Baton Rouge, 2003).

6. Steve Chapman, “Relocating May Be Better Than Rebuilding,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 2007.

7. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), 15.

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