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Introduction

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Special Issue: Geographies of Louisiana

Introduction

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In recognition of the location of American Association of Geographers (AAG) 2018 Annual Meeting in New Orleans, *Southeastern Geographer* is offering an open access Special Issue: Geographies of Louisiana. *Southeastern Geographer* has been publishing original research articles for more than 60 years. The journal has grown from an annual publication (1961), to biennial (1969), to quarterly (2009). *Southeastern Geographer* partnered with Project MUSE to facilitate online distribution of all journal content through subscribing institutions. *Southeastern Geographer* continued its venture into the digital world by sharing links to newly published work over Twitter (2016), and accepting online submission and review of manuscripts through ScholarOne (2017). We now introduce our inaugural open access special issue, a compilation of past research articles.

Since its founding in 1962, *Southeastern Geographer* has included publications related to racial segregation in residential neighborhoods, electoral geographies, and Confederate monuments. The articles selected for inclusion in this special issue touch on these themes and more. Some of the papers focus on New Orleans itself, while others take a synoptic view to contextualize Louisiana in relation to more extensive geographies.

As many of the authors in this issue would contend, New Orleans grew into an economic hub and cultural cross-roads in part because its geographic location. It served as a gateway port between the Gulf of Mexico and the expansive, far-reaching Mississippi River during the era when rivers were the transportation corridors. Culturally, New Orleans has a distinctive French influence not found in other major US cities, but shared with some of the smaller cities, towns, and rural areas of Louisiana. To know something about the region requires understanding its colonial history; Louisiana was initially a French colony, which was then controlled by the Spanish, reverted briefly to French control, and was finally sold to the United States in 1803. Louisiana gained statehood in 1812.

Some of the earliest papers in this collection represent longstanding traditions of regional geography. Estaville (1986) explores French cultural influences in Louisiana using cartographic and toponymic analysis. His 1986 paper critically analyzes methods used to spatially delineate the French influence in Louisiana through time using 45 maps produced during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Eighteenth century maps presented few sources or methods, but mapped French—rather than English or Spanish—colonial settlements. Nineteenth century maps relied upon toponyms or the French derived system of land surveying (ardets) which differed from Anglo surveying units. Twentieth century maps tended to include cultural factors (crawfish industry, French ovens, Catholicism), French-derived toponyms or surnames, or political voting patterns. The analysis suggests correlation between areas of French influence, support of wet liquor laws, and progressive racial attitudes (especially in Creole regions). Estaville (1990) explored the adoption of English language and culture by the Louisiana French in the nineteenth century, as Louisiana experienced numerous cultural and political changes. While many French-derived words, surnames, and attitudes remain in parts of Louisiana, pre-dominance of French as native language declined due to sheer number of Anglophones

immigrating to the region, effective legislation adopting English as the official language, and the perception that use of English was tied to economic opportunity. In a later expression of the same broad tradition, McEwen (2014) explores the vernacular regional geography of Louisiana. In keeping with a long twentieth century tradition of regional geography, McEwen demonstrates that the vernacular of business names offers insight into regional differences in cultural identity. Cajun, Creole, and Acadians are not interchangeable identities and reflect different historical events and migrations.

New Orleans historically is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the USA, although the “how” and “why” of residential segregation is tangled. Three papers examine racial segregation in New Orleans, albeit in different centuries and through different lenses.

Sumpter (2008) explores racial segregation in New Orleans during the Antebellum period, which coincided with the transition from colonial territory to nascent US State. At that time, New Orleans was home to both free and enslaved people of color—a term encompassing African-Americans, Native Americans, and biracial people. The period between 1813 and 1830 was a “Golden Age” for free people of color in terms of population, wealth, and prestige. With the influx of Anglos and the Americanization of New Orleans, racial perceptions became racially binary (Black or White) rather than seeing race as spectrum as was typical during the French and Spanish colonial periods. Moreover, a series of laws were enacted which codified social and spatial segregation, prohibited the immigration of free people of color into Louisiana, and required a \$1,000 bond from an owner emancipating an enslaved person. Sumpter’s study demonstrates that perceptions of race changed over a relatively short time frame (~30 years) in the same place but in a shifting context.

Strait, Gong, and Williams (2007) paper examines residential segregation New Orleans from 1990–2000. They investigated self-selectivity in housing and the influx of Hispanic and Asian immigrants into New Orleans through the lens of residential segregation in the city. While racial diversity increased over this period, New Orleans remains highly segregated, especially between the Black and White populations. Redistribution of White people tends to isolate them more from other ethnicities, although all groups show some degree of self-selectivity. Taken together, these articles underscore that even while racial perceptions have been seen to change over a relatively short time period (in early nineteenth century New Orleans), existing patterns of residential racial segregation are reinforced by entrenched cultural histories and power structures.

Watkins and Hagelman (2011) explore correlations between the 30-year antecedent changes in the social geography of New Orleans to the inundation resulting from Hurricane Katrina. While New Orleans is situated in a naturally hazardous environment susceptible to flooding, this risk has historically been offset by the economic opportunities inherent in its location as a gateway between the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. Watkins and Hagelman’s study found that contemporary racial composition of neighborhoods was a better predictor of flooding following Katrina than income, even when controlled for the interaction among race and income. The study also found that heterogeneity of neighborhoods had decreased in the decades prior to Katrina, although the reasons are unclear, and not solely explained by “white flight” to the suburbs.

The inadequacies of New Orleans’ engineered water control system following Hurricane Katrina is significant since climate models predict that the frequency of extreme rainfall events will increase. Keim and Muller (1993) examine rainfall patterns in New Orleans from 1900 to 1991.

Most of the rainfall was related to frontal systems, rather than tropical storms or hurricanes. Temporally, rain associated with frontal systems peaked in the spring, while tropical systems accounted for most of rain in the fall. Detailed studies of local rainfall patterns contribute to knowledge of how weather might change in locales as global average temperatures increase.

Geographers have long wrestled with the political geography of the region, including efforts to define the region at all. James (2010) applied economic beta convergence theory and boundary analyses to re-examine the geographical extent of the “South” in 1970 and 2004. Geostatistical analyses suggest that the disjunct regions of New Orleans and northeastern Louisiana cluster with nearby regions of the economic “South”, yet also identified diversity within the region. James recognizes that his analyses are not the only way to define the “South”, and underscores that the boundaries are fuzzy, rarely follow state lines, and that regional identity or cultural influences may shift through time.

Cultural and identity boundaries may be fuzzy, but electoral boundaries for presidential elections follow state lines. More importantly, the popular vote winner claims all electoral votes in most states, with only Colorado, Maine, and Nebraska proportionally allotting electoral votes. Consequently, the electoral votes may not reflect the popular vote split among parties. Birdsall (1969) investigated the role of a third party/independent voters in support of George Wallace, former Governor of Alabama, in the 1968 presidential election. During the 1968 presidential election cycle, several southeastern states—including Louisiana— were strongholds for Wallace as a third-party candidate. It is noteworthy that Wallace had run for President as a Democrat in 1964 and 1972, and supported racial segregation during his term as governor of Alabama. Birdsall found that strongholds of Wallace support were related to proximity to Alabama (Louisiana is adjacent to Alabama), and Wallace support was higher among rural White voters (winning 40 to 80 percent of this segment). While Birdsall did not analyze voter support in terms of French influence, visual comparison of Birdsall’s maps with Estaville’s (1986) maps suggest that the many of the historically French-influenced parishes in Louisiana coincided with lower support for Wallace even though those parishes tended to be rural and White.

While Presidential elections may be determined by electoral votes at the State level, federal congressional races are determined by congressional districts within States. These districts are re-drawn every 10 years (following a Census) to re-apportion House of Representatives by population so that the number of Representatives remains at 435, as set forth in the US Constitution. Webster (1995) evaluated the impacts of Congressional redistricting according to six criteria related to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its’ amendments enacted in 1982 which sought to reduce gerrymandering. The two criteria of equal representation by population and representation (non-dilution) of minority populations were largely met. However, the other four criteria of equal treatment of political parties, representation responsiveness (safe vs. competitive seats), the division of local political units, and compactness/contiguity were not met by the 1990 redistricting. Congressional redistricting following the 2010 Census gave rise to litigation in ten states, including four southern States (Li, Wolf, and Farmer 2018).

Confederate monuments have re-emerged in our national dialogue as cultural identity, race, and politics intersect. *Southeastern Geographer’s* long critical engagement with the politics of Confederate monuments includes John Winberry’s early paper exploring the spatial distribution of Confederate monuments throughout the South While not a comprehensive inventory of Confederate monuments, Winberry’s analysis reflects the dominant cultural impetus for the

monuments and interprets the historical and social influences on their establishment. Initially, cemeteries were the first space Confederate monuments were erected, and their form typically reflected Victorian mourning symbology. The early twentieth century saw a sharp increase in the establishment of Confederate monuments, however the location shifted to town squares and court houses (e.g. public spaces of power) and their form shifted to a physical representation of the Confederate soldier. Removal of Confederate monuments has gained momentum in the past few years, fueled in part by the violence and racial hatred at the root of the Charleston Massacre on June 17, 2015 (see Special Forum in *Southeastern Geographer* 56-1) and the August 11—12, 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville VA which on its surface was to protest removal of monument to General Robert E. Lee (see Special Forum in *Southeastern Geographer* 58-1). New Orleans City Council voted in December 2015 to remove the four Confederate monuments within the city. The price of removal was originally estimated at \$170,000 (Adelson 2015) but final costs exceeded \$2 million because of litigation and additional security after contractors hired to remove the monuments received threats (Adelson 2017); some of the pedestals remain and are being repurposed.

In addition to the articles included in this virtual issue, *Southeastern Geographer* has published more than 20 additional articles related to Louisiana which can be accessed through Project MUSE. Some explored unique cultural aspects, such as Creole trail rides (Giancarlo (2016) or interest in historical narratives told at Laura Plantation outside of New Orleans based upon tourists' socio-demographic (Butler, Carter, and Dwyer 2008). Other papers have investigated Louisiana in the broader context of the southeastern United States, including electoral geographies of Presidential elections (Shelley and Archer 1995), migration patterns in the Black Belt region (Ambinakudige, Parisi, and Grice 2012), vernacular regions (Ambinakudige 2009), changing characteristics of the Bible Belt (Brunn, Webster, and Archer 2011), politics of mobility in light of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill (Henderson 2011) as well as the persistence of surficial oil following this spill (Crowsey 2013).

In addition, the journal has published book reviews on related volumes. These include *Hispanic and Latino New Orleans: Immigration and Identity Since the Eighteenth Century* (Snider 2017) or *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Sinclair 2004) or *Delta Sugar: Louisiana's Vanishing Plantation Landscape* (Mathewson 2000) or *Louisiana Place Names of Indian Origin, A Collection of Words* (Hilburn 2012).

We invite travelers to New Orleans to draw on some of these resources for a textured understanding of a complex city with a long and variegated history.

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