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## **(Post-)K New Orleans and the Hispanic Atlantic: Geographic method and meaning**

Andrew Sluyter\*

An explicitly methodological case study conducted for a multidisciplinary symposium on the Atlantic relationships of pre- and (post-)Katrina Louisiana illustrates some methods that geographers might usefully contribute to an emergent Atlantic Studies. Three general types of method apply to a substantive question related to the hurricane that struck on the morning of 29 August 2005: Is (post-)Katrina New Orleans emerging as a Hispanic place in contrast to its predominant pre-Katrina associations with the Black and French Atlantics? One type of method involves spatial analysis of data, whether social survey data such as census enumerations, environmental data such as flood depth and persistence, or others. Another relies on fieldwork that combines informal interviews with observation of landscape elements, both those diagnostic of past relational processes and those suggestive of emerging ones. The third employs analysis of long-term dynamics in the relationships among places, in this particular case New Orleans, the Canary Islands, Honduras, and other places of the Hispanic Atlantic. That mix of methods makes understandable some of the processes driving the emerging Hispanic geography of New Orleans, such as new Hispanic in-migrants creating a place for themselves among the Vietnamese of New Orleans East. The question of whether New Orleans is really emerging as a Hispanic place thus begins to become much more meaningful than the categorical claims to date, which have cited a relatively minor increase in the proportion of a social survey category termed Hispanic, while ignoring the much more significant shifting location of New Orleans within the network of relational processes that comprise the Hispanic Atlantic.

**Keywords:** spatial analysis; cultural-historical analysis; fieldwork; space of flows

### **Introduction: The geographical turn**

The geographical turn engages scholars throughout the humanities and social sciences in reevaluation of long-established assumptions about regions, spatial scale, and the natural/social processes relating distant lands and peoples. Atlantic Studies and other ocean-centered approaches emerging out of that reevaluation are bringing together scholars from multiple disciplinary and area studies traditions to create methods appropriate to understanding the processes through which the places surrounding those basins have come into being in dynamic relationship with one another.<sup>1</sup> An explicitly methodological case study conducted for a multidisciplinary symposium on the Atlantic relationships of pre- and (post-)Katrina Louisiana forms part of that on-going effort and illustrates some methods that geographers might usefully contribute to an emergent Atlantic Studies.

The case study poses a fairly narrow question about the changing character of a place in order to provide substance while retaining a sharp focus on method: Is (post-)Katrina New Orleans or, to echo the vernacular, (post-)K New Orleans, emerging as a Hispanic place in contrast to its predominant pre-K associations with the Black and French

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Atlantic? The (post-)K prominence of Hispanics at day-labor pick-up places and some social survey data have certainly encouraged some academics, newspaper reporters, and public officials to suggest that Hispanics are *flooding* into New Orleans in a human version of Katrina's storm surge. A few examples follow:

Within months of Katrina striking New Orleans on the morning of August 29th, 2005, Mayor Ray Nagin was bemoaning that his city was being "overrun by Mexican workers."<sup>2</sup>

Scarlett Alaniz-Diaz, the Hispanic liaison for the suburb of Kenner, responded by rejoicing that New Orleans might become "a future San Antonio."<sup>3</sup>

By 2006, the Louisiana Health and Population Survey had seemingly provided some supporting evidence by reporting that Orleans Parish had indeed tripled its percentage of Hispanic residents since Census 2000.<sup>4</sup>

Elizabeth Fussell, a sociologist at Tulane University, concluded that "New Orleans is just catching up with a trend that's happening in every other city in the country."<sup>5</sup>

By 2007, belief in the Hispanicization of New Orleans had become so widespread that a reporter for the Baton Rouge *Advocate* could indulge in a diluvian riff: "The *waves* of Hispanic immigrants who *poured* into New Orleans in the weeks and months after Hurricane Katrina's *floodwaters* *receded* to help rebuild the city now are facing a *torrent* of health- and work-related issues."<sup>6</sup>

But whether (post-)K New Orleans will emerge as a Hispanic place remains uncertain in many ways and, therefore, a worthwhile substantive focus for this methodological case study.

### Emergent methods

Methodological case studies prompt some initial reconsideration of taken-for-granted terms and explication of approach. Terms such as New Orleans, (post-)K, and Hispanic all encompass complexities far beyond what a few paragraphs can explore, but some basics require attention. In turn, the exercise of terminological reconsideration prompts innovations in approach.

The New Orleans of this study does not correspond to the seven-parish area that the US Census Bureau calls the New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).<sup>7</sup> Instead, New Orleans refers to the built-up area south of Lake Pontchartrain, stretching from the Duncan Canal and the hurricane-protection levee along the Jefferson Parish-St Charles Parish line eastward to the wetlands of Lake Borgne and then southward from the lakeshore across the Mississippi River to the wetlands of the Barataria Basin (Figure 1). That vernacular New Orleans includes New Orleans proper, New Orleans East, Chalmette, Metairie, and Kenner as well as the Westbank communities stretching downriver from South Kenner to Belle Chasse. That area encompasses the urbanized sections of Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, and St Bernard parishes and the vast majority of their populations and census tracts.

The term (post-)K does not strictly correspond to post-K, the vernacular verbal abbreviation for post-Katrina, which simply means any time after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans on 29 August 2005. In contrast, (post-)K rejects that particular temporality just as (post)colonialism rejects that of "the colonizer's model of the world" because Katrina remains very much a dominant force reshaping New Orleans.<sup>8</sup> Katrina is not over and done with: what happened then remains very much part of what happens

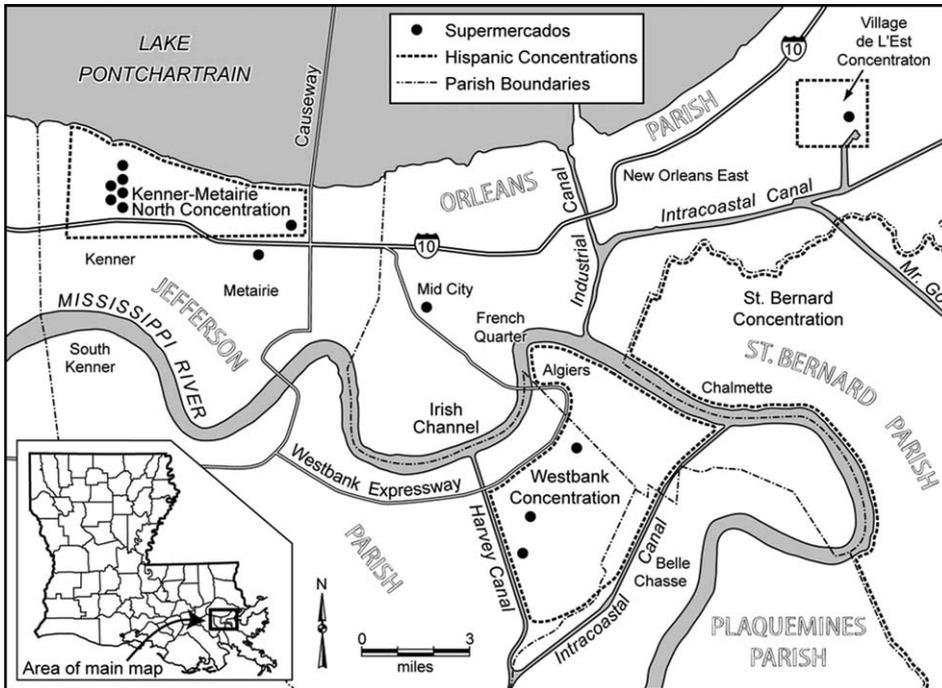


Figure 1. The New Orleans area as defined for the purposes of this study, parish boundaries, Hispanic population concentrations and supermarkets (*supermercados*), and various places mentioned in the text.

now. Understanding the present and making good decisions in it requires understanding what happened long before, during, and after Katrina.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, using Hispanic Atlantic critically contrasts with such regional constructs as Latin America, a term coined by French geographers of the 1860s as part of a geopolitical discourse that promoted Paris as the metropole of (post)colonial Latin America. Although France later largely retreated from the Americas, the term Latin America persisted to become part of the structure that attained florescence in the area studies institutions of the Cold War, an ethnocentric project that constructs non-Western lands and peoples as static, compartmentalized, and isolated except through the intervention of Westerners.<sup>10</sup> Atlantic Studies, in contrast, has emerged to counter that territorial objectification by revealing historically and geographically dynamic natural/social processes through which circum-Atlantic places have emerged in relation to one another.<sup>11</sup> Just as some have termed one such network of relationships the Black Atlantic, the Hispanic Atlantic serves to emphasize a somewhat different, albeit strongly overlapping, “space of flows.”

Terms such as Hispanic and Black, of course, have themselves emerged through those same material/discursive, relational processes. The networks of relationships involved in the many Atlantics consequently overlap and interact in ways that transgress such categories.<sup>12</sup> Determination of whether (post-)K New Orleans might or might not be emerging as a Hispanic place cannot, therefore, involve simply another social survey to measure the current categorical moment while ignoring the long-term relational processes through which that moment has emerged. Even from an instrumentalist perspective, the term Hispanic might well mean something, most probably quite a few different things, to

the 35.3 million people, some 12.5% of the US population, who self-identified as “Hispanic or Latino” during Census 2000.<sup>13</sup> Yet changes in census categories used and cultural perceptions of the meanings of such categories among respondents and between one census and another as well as overlap between the racial and ethnic self-identifications render census and other such social-survey data problematic and inter-censal comparisons even more so.<sup>14</sup> In deeper epistemological terms, moreover, because categories such as Hispanic have emerged as part of the very processes under study they cannot provide an objective measure of those processes.

Instead of an approach that involves the generation of even more such categorical social survey data, then, any meaningful understanding of (post-)K Hispanic New Orleans requires analysis of the dynamic processes involved in the long-term relationship between New Orleans and the Hispanic Atlantic. That relationship has persisted for centuries but dynamism has resulted in the establishment of two general types of pre-K Hispanic communities, herein termed the colonial Hispanics and neo-colonial Hispanics. The first analytic step, then, must involve determination of the processes through which those colonial and neo-colonial Hispanics became established in quite distinct parts of the city and how that pre-K Hispanic geography interacted with Katrina’s flood geography to affect differentially the colonial and neo-colonial Hispanics. The second step must be to determine how (post-)K relationships between New Orleans and the Hispanic Atlantic are emerging in ways that might result in the establishment of entirely new types of Hispanic communities.

Three broad types of geographic method seem most useful to such an approach.<sup>15</sup> One involves spatial analysis of data such as social survey and environmental data, especially census and flood data. The second requires fieldwork in New Orleans that combines informal interviews with observation of landscape elements, both those diagnostic of past relationships with the Hispanic Atlantic and those suggestive of emergent ones. The third employs analysis of long-term dynamics in the relationships among distant lands and peoples, in this case New Orleans and some of the other places of the Hispanic Atlantic.

### **Colonial relationships and Hispanics**

The French founded La Nouvelle-Orléans in 1718 on what since the 1500s the Spaniards had considered the northern frontier of their colonial empire, and in the 1760s it became part of New Spain by the Treaty of Paris that ended the French and Indian War. For the next four decades, the Captains General of Cuba, represented locally by a series of governors, would rule New Orleans out of Havana before the French briefly regained political control from 1800 until the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.<sup>16</sup>

Fieldwork reveals various landscape vestiges that manifest that relationship between New Orleans and the colonial Hispanic Atlantic. The Spanish government built the most prominent example, the Cabildo, in the late 1700s in a similar style as the municipal hall of Buenos Aires and thereby marked both cities as once having been part of the same colonial Hispanic Atlantic. In addition, while most of the French Quarter buildings date to after the Louisiana Purchase, a few date to the Spanish period, identified as such by their stuccoed brick and flat roofs.<sup>17</sup> The Spaniards also built St Louis Cemetery No. 1, the above ground tombs being a Spanish rather than French trait.

Besides such obvious landscape vestiges, immigrants involved in that colonial relationship created a lasting pre-K Hispanic community: the colonial Hispanics. The Spanish government brought *Isleños* from the Canary Islanders to New Orleans to serve as a settler militia.<sup>18</sup> That strategy became quite general throughout the colonial Hispanic

Atlantic, the Canary Islands serving not only as a strategic outpost from which to control trans-oceanic shipping and as a place to prototype colonial institutions but as a convenient source of impoverished Hispanics willing to settle newly acquired territories in Louisiana and elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> Like the some 3,000 Acadians from French Canada, who also came to Louisiana during Spanish rule, the approximately 2,000 Isleños did not settle in what is now the French Quarter of New Orleans but in the surrounding wetlands, with the Acadians mainly along bayous to the west and the Isleños to the east, in what became St Bernard Parish.

Mapping and thereby spatially analyzing some of the statistics that Census 2000 generated reveals that many of the descendants of those colonial immigrants then self-identified as Hispanics and remained concentrated in St Bernard Parish. In 2000, that parish had a total population of 67,229, some 7.0% of the total population of the four-parish New Orleans area.<sup>20</sup> It had 3,425 Hispanics or Latinos, 6.7% of the 51,102 in the four parishes and 5.1% of St Bernard Parish's total population. Of those 3,425 who self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, some 23% (794) identified more precisely as being Spanish, Spaniard, or Spanish American rather than of Mexican, Honduran, Cuban, or some other national origin. In contrast, much lower proportions of Hispanics or Latinos in the other three parishes self-identified as Spanish, Spaniard, or Spanish American: 6.7% in Jefferson Parish, 7.1% in Orleans Parish, and 8.5% in Plaquemines Parish. Nationally the contrast was even greater, with only 2.4% of all the 35.3 million Hispanics or Latinos in the United States self-identifying as Spanish, Spaniard, or Spanish American. Yet St Bernard Parish has not attracted immigrants from Spain for centuries, so at least some New Orleans residents whose ancestors came from the Canary Islands during colonial times seem to have self-identified on Census 2000 as Hispanics of Spanish origin.

Not only did Census 2000 reflect that concentration of pre-K colonial Hispanics in St Bernard Parish, but fieldwork reveals that those Isleño descendants have established landscape elements that construct a partially Hispanic place. Examples include toponyms such as Judge Perez Drive, the main thoroughfare of the parish, the annual Los Isleños Fiesta, the Irish/Italian/Isleño Parade, the Isleños Heritage and Multi-Cultural Park, and the Canary Islands Descendants Association Museum (Figure 2).



Figure 2. A sign of colonial times announces the annual Los Isleños Fiesta along Judge Perez Drive in Chalmette (photograph by author; 03.21.07). The colors are blue on a background of canary yellow.

### Neo-colonial relationships and Hispanics

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 placed New Orleans under US political control, but its relationship with the Hispanic Atlantic persisted as it became, until surpassed by Houston in the mid 1900s, the major US metropolis on the Gulf Coast.<sup>21</sup> During that heyday, New Orleans served as the self-proclaimed gateway to the Americas and the so-called Logical Port for shipping to and from points south. That relationship took many forms: in 1822, an expedition to support Simón Bolívar sailed from New Orleans; so did the force that invaded Veracruz under Winfield Scott in 1847; and later Mexican exiles from the French Intervention such as Benito Juárez found refuge in New Orleans. Products, people, and invasive species such as the water hyacinth and nutria flowed between New Orleans and the ports of the Hispanic Atlantic: Veracruz and Tampico in Mexico, Havana and Matanzas in Cuba, Rio de Janeiro in South America, and many others.<sup>22</sup>

Two commodities, though, bananas and coffee, came to dominate such trade and political relationships in the 1900s. One firm, the United Fruit Company, exemplified the banana trade and the types of relationships created between New Orleans and so-called banana republics.<sup>23</sup> In 1933, Samuel Zemurray, a Russian immigrant known as Sam the Banana Man who had been importing bananas into New Orleans since 1895, acquired the United Fruit Company of Boston, moved its headquarters to 321 St Charles Avenue in the central business district (not far from the Thalia Street Wharf where the banana boats unloaded), and proceeded to run what became known throughout the Hispanic Atlantic as La Frutera (The Fruit Company), Mamita Yunay (Mommy United), and El Pulpo (The Octopus). United Fruit and affiliates such as its Great White Fleet controlled the US banana supply and virtually ran Central American politics, dictating who would be the presidents of its nominal republics and having an enormous impact on Central American and Caribbean places through involvement with the CIA in such covert operations as the 1954 overthrow of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán and the 1961 Bay of Pigs attempted invasion of Cuba. At its most powerful, United Fruit controlled through lease and purchase some 3.5 million acres in Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama), the Caribbean (Cuba, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic), and South America (Colombia and Ecuador).

By the 1970s, New Orleans no longer controlled banana trade and politics. Even as early as 1950, the port's share of US banana imports had fallen to around a quarter. Zemurray died in 1961 and his company disappeared soon thereafter through mergers, its nearest present-day successor being Chiquita Brands International. The Standard Fruit and Steamship Company, another New Orleans banana firm, founded by the Sicilian Vaccaro family, never achieved the scale or infamy of United Fruit, and in any case moved its operations to Gulfport, Mississippi in the 1960s and then became part of the Dole Corporation.

Coffee, especially from Central America and Brazil, became the other major agricultural commodity linking New Orleans to the Hispanic Atlantic, beginning in the 1800s and continuing through to the present. New Orleans handled around a quarter of US coffee imports before Katrina, the largest share of any US port, with an enormous Folgers Plant occupying the riverfront. The neo-colonial relationships created between New Orleans coffee companies and places in Central and South America – chiefly Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Brazil, and Colombia – paralleled those created through the banana trade and led to the term coffee republic as a variant on banana republic. Unlike bananas, however, the New Orleans coffee trade was long distributed

among dozens of relatively small companies and none achieved the dominance, power, and infamy of Zemurray's United Fruit.

The relationship to the Hispanic Atlantic, especially to Central America, that Zemurray helped to establish persists in various ways in New Orleans. In terms of area studies, the main vestige remains Tulane University's Roger Thayer Stone Center for Latin American Studies, named after the husband of Zemurray's daughter, Doris Zemurray Stone, in appreciation of her sustained philanthropic support. In terms of notable landscape vestiges, between 1957 and 1966, the city erected monuments on the Basin Street neutral ground to Simon Bolívar, Benito Juárez, and Francisco Morazán Quesada, ironically some of the Hispanic Atlantic's principal figures of nineteenth-century republicanism. United Fruit's Great White Fleet of banana freighters lives on in the color scheme, name, and emblem of the White Fleet taxicab company. Moreover, the company headquarters building remains standing on St Charles Avenue, the ornate pilasters surmounted by three cornucopia spilling bananas and other tropical fruits.

The Hondurans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, Cubans, Salvadorans, Dominicans, Colombians, and other Hispanics who migrated to New Orleans because of the relationship established through banana and coffee trade and politics have made more vernacular imprints on the landscape. The single largest group of those neo-colonial Hispanics originated in Honduras, where both Standard Fruit and United Fruit had major operations. The initial immigration remained small scale and concentrated in the Lower Garden District for several decades, generally in the neighborhood known as the Irish Channel, with Hispanics moving in as the Irish moved out over the 1940s through 1970s.<sup>24</sup> Those *Catrachos*, as *émigré* Hondurans refer to themselves, called that neighborhood *El Barrio Lempira*, after the Honduran currency. Hurricane Hattie in 1959 devastated the north coast of Honduras and pushed a wave of laid-off banana workers to emigrate. Civil war in several of the banana and coffee republics through the 1990s continued to provide a push factor. New Orleans's pull factors included familiarity as the main destination for the banana and coffee crops, similarities of climate and landscape, the dominance of Catholicism, and contact with relatives who had been part of the long-standing small-scale migration. Meanwhile, Hispanics were moving out of the *Barrio Lempira*, both into other parts of Orleans Parish such as Mid City and into the new suburbs that emerged from the former wetlands of Kenner, Metairie, and the Westbank beginning in 1959.<sup>25</sup>

Spatial analysis of Census 2000 reveals the areas in which those neo-colonial Hispanics were concentrated five years pre-K, the most prominent being the Kenner-Metairie North concentration in Jefferson Parish.<sup>26</sup> Approximately bounded on the west by the St Charles parish line, on the south by I-10, on the north by the lake, and on the east by North Causeway Boulevard, in 2000 that concentration's 25 census tracts had a total population of 108,514, 10.7% of the 1,013,193 inhabitants of the four-parish area. Within Kenner-Metairie North, the Hispanic or Latino population was 13,333, 12.3% of the total population and thus approaching the 2000 US average of 12.5%. More than one quarter (26.1%) of the Hispanic or Latino population of the four parishes concentrated in Kenner-Metairie North and the following identifiable groups even more so: Nicaraguans (41.6%), Guatemalans (38%), Salvadorans (34.2%), and Hondurans (33%). Hondurans made up the largest single group (2,494/18.7%), followed by Cubans (1,354/10.0%) and Mexicans (1,262/9.5%), the latter a manifestation of a broader neo-colonial relationship between Mexico and the United States as a whole rather than the specific one the banana and coffee republics had with New Orleans in particular.<sup>27</sup>

A primary landscape manifestation of that concentration is the Hispanic supermarket, the many located along Williams Boulevard in Kenner and Veterans Memorial Boulevard



Figure 3. A sign of neo-colonial times at a *supermercado* in Kenner (photograph by author; 01.09.07). The bowl on the woman's head is full of fruit.

in Metairie helping to create a Hispanic sense of place (Figure 3). Most such *supermercados* are the size of corner stores, sometimes have a lunch counter or restaurant section, and offer other essentials beyond familiar food, namely money transfers and telephone calls to Central America. The many other Hispanic-oriented businesses that cluster along Williams Boulevard – restaurants, lawyers, money exchange and transfer offices, beauty salons, and so on – further invoke a Hispanic landscape and sense of place.

The other notable pre-K, neo-colonial Hispanic population had settled across the river in the Westbank concentration, approximately bounded by the Westbank Expressway on the north, the river on the east, the Intracoastal Canal on the south, and the Harvey Canal on the west. In 2000, that concentration's 24 census tracts had a total population of 108,893, comprising 10.7% of the total population of all four parishes and therefore quite comparable to Kenner-Metairie North in both size and population density.<sup>28</sup> The 6,978 Hispanics or Latinos of the Westbank concentration, though, made up only 6.4% of its total population, about half the 2000 US average of 12.5%, and 13.7% of all Hispanics or Latinos in the four-parish area. While not as dense a concentration as Kenner-Metairie North, then, Mexicans, Hondurans, and Cubans did similarly comprise the largest groups in Westbank, together making up 42% of that concentration's total Hispanic or Latino population. Westbank *supermercados* were located along the major thoroughfares – Terry Parkway, Lapalco Boulevard, and Manhattan Boulevard – but without the population concentration to support the sort of density of Hispanic-oriented businesses as in Kenner-Metairie North.

Together those two spatial concentrations included 39.8% of all self-categorized Hispanics or Latinos living in the four-parish area in 2000, with some groups even more highly concentrated. Some 61.0% of Dominicans in the four parishes lived in Kenner-Metairie North and Westbank, as did 52.2% of Nicaraguans, 49% of Guatemalans, 48.8% of Salvadorans, 45.5% of Hondurans, 42.0% of Colombians, 39.7% of Cubans, 36.8% of Puerto Ricans, and 31.0% of Mexicans. Kenner-Metairie North was more important to most of those groups, most notably with 33% of Hondurans, 41.6% of Nicaraguans, 38% of Guatemalans, 34.2% of Salvadorans, 22.8% of Colombians, and 26% of Cubans. Westbank, in contrast, was home to 42.4% of Dominicans. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were more evenly spread between the two and throughout New Orleans in general.

Despite those two concentrations, neo-colonial Hispanics lived throughout the four parishes, and other areas of minor concentration occurred outside of Kenner-Metairie North and Westbank in 2000. The only notable one in Orleans Parish was Mid City and, to some extent, the census tracts arcing northwestward from Mid City into Lakeview. Those 12 census tracts south and west of City Park had 2,896 Hispanics or Latinos, 5.7% of all Hispanics or Latinos in the four parishes. The southern apex of the concentration, the intersection of South Carrollton and Tulane Avenues had a concentration of neo-colonial

Hispanic businesses including La Union Supermarket, Las Islas Nite Club, and La Hacienda Restaurant.

### Pre-K Hispanic New Orleans

Those concentrations of Hispanics, whether originating in colonial or neo-colonial processes relating New Orleans to the Hispanic Atlantic, did not make pre-K New Orleans a notably Hispanic US city. Census 2000 recorded 35.3 million people, some 12.5% of the US population of 281.4 million, who self-identified as Hispanic or Latino.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, their growth rate over the 1990s, while recognizing the issues involved in intercensal comparisons, was nearly 58% and suggests that their proportion of the population will reach 30% by 2050. In stark contrast, the Hispanic or Latino population of the four New Orleans parishes in 2000 was only 51,102, 5.0% of the total population of the four-parish area and 0.16% of the total Hispanic or Latino population of the United States. Even Jefferson Parish, which with 32,418 Hispanics or Latinos had the most of the four parishes, came in at only 7.1% Hispanic or Latino. Pre-K New Orleans, then, despite longstanding relationships with the Hispanic Atlantic, had by 2000 in no way become a Hispanic city comparable to Los Angeles, Houston, or Miami – where Hispanic populations have attained majority status or soon will.<sup>30</sup>

Nor, as of Census 2000, did New Orleans seem to be part of the emergent New Latino South.<sup>31</sup> Between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic populations of cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, Greensboro-Winston Salem, and Raleigh-Durham had growth rates of 388–809%, starting at bases of only 6,844–55,045 but increasing an order of magnitude to 62,210–268,851.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, the Hispanic population of New Orleans increased by only 5.1% over the 1990s, with Orleans, St Bernard, and Plaquemines Parishes actually declining by 14–27% and with only Jefferson Parish increasing by 22%, some undoubtedly having relocated from the other three parishes, and thereby forcing the average above zero. Even considered alone, Jefferson Parish fell far behind the national growth rate of nearly 58% over the 1990s and the even higher growth rates of the New Latino South.

One explanation for why pre-K New Orleans never became a major Hispanic city has to be the lack of economic opportunity since the decline in the oil industry in the 1980s. The associated employment loss has caused New Orleans to lose population overall since Census 1980, with the four-parish area at 1,102,253 inhabitants in 1980, 1,037,450 in 1990, and 1,013,193 in 2000, indicating decadal declines of 5.9% over the 1980s and 2.3% over the 1990s.

Pre-K Hispanic New Orleans also displayed a notable lack of interaction between colonial and neo-colonial Hispanics.<sup>33</sup> Distance of various sorts seems to have precluded a closer relationship. One group immigrated in the 1900s, the other in the 1700s. One group concentrated in Jefferson Parish, the other in St Bernard Parish. One group identifies with Latin America, the other with Spain. One group has an urban orientation, the other a rural one. And one group uses Latin American dialects of Castilian, the other the distinct Louisiana-Isleño dialect.

### Katrina

When Katrina hit on the morning of 29 August 2005, the hurricane affected neo-colonial Hispanics, colonial Hispanics, and all other residents of New Orleans.<sup>34</sup> In Orleans Parish, the Lower Ninth Ward flooded through a breach in the Industrial Canal. Lakeview and Mid City flooded through a breach in the east levee of the 17th Street Canal, which follows

the Jefferson Parish line. In addition, the neighborhoods south of the University of New Orleans campus flooded through breaches in the London Avenue Canal. All together, some 80% of Orleans Parish flooded. In addition, virtually all of St Bernard Parish flooded, partially because of the storm surge that bored up the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet Canal (MRGO, locally known as Mr Go), a shipping channel. Hurricane Rita followed, striking the Gulf Coast near Lake Charles on 24 September, nearly a month after Katrina. Plans to reopen New Orleans on 19 September, after levees had been patched and much of the city pumped dry were cancelled as Rita approached – fortunately, because Rita did re-flood part of the Lower Ninth Ward.

### **(Post-)K Hispanic New Orleans**

Spatially comparing areas of worst flooding with those in which colonial and neo-colonial Hispanics were concentrated reveals that those two groups suffered greatly differing impacts, both relative to each other and to the total population. Katrina devastated the area of concentration for colonial Hispanics, the *Isleños* of St Bernard Parish.<sup>35</sup> However, the concentrations of neo-colonial Hispanics remained relatively unscathed. Kenner-Metairie North, while bordering Lake Pontchartrain, did not suffer major intrusion of water through levee breaches in any way comparable to neighboring Lakeview. In addition, Westbank remained out of the path of storm surges from either Lake Pontchartrain or Mr Go. Both of those concentrations of neo-colonial Hispanics did have some flooding due to the heavy precipitation but they were pumped out relatively quickly. They also suffered from wind damage, such as the notorious case of the Hispanic-dominated Redwood Park Apartments in Kenner.<sup>36</sup>

In comparison, other communities, especially in Orleans Parish, took the brunt of the persistent flooding and have suffered the most depopulation due to a lack of (post-)K returnees. According to one analysis, 58% of New Orleans residents suffered some initial flooding between 29 and 31 August and 40% suffered persistent flooding that lasted at least through 8 September.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, while Hispanics suffered the same average rate (58%) of initial flooding, only 24% suffered persistent flooding. Blacks and Asians, with major population concentrations in Orleans Parish, suffered the most from persistent flooding, respectively 60%, and 36%. Only 24% of Whites suffered persistent flooding because they were concentrated in higher elevation areas of Orleans Parish or, like Hispanics, in Jefferson Parish. By January 2006, the US Census Bureau had developed special estimates for parish populations two months pre-K and four months (post-)K: between July 2005 and January 2006, Jefferson Parish went from 448,578 to 411,305, a loss of only 8.3%; Plaquemines Parish from 28,282 to 20,164, a decline of 28.7%; Orleans Parish from 437,186 to 158,353, losing a dramatic 63.8% of its population; St Bernard Parish from 64,576 to 3,361, a staggering loss of 94.8%; and the four-parish area as a whole from 1,013,193 to 593,183, a 41.5% decline.<sup>38</sup> Those same special census estimates revealed that the percentage of Hispanics in the seven parishes of the New Orleans MSA rose slightly, to around 6%, although the small sample size did not allow estimates for each parish.

Accounting only for the differential impact of Katrina on the colonial and neo-colonial Hispanics and on other groups, suggests that (post-)K New Orleans will be somewhat more Hispanic than pre-K New Orleans. Because the pre-K proportional representation of Hispanics was so low, 5% for all Hispanics or Latinos across the four-parish area in 2000, even if all 51,102 that Census 2000 enumerated suffered minimal impact and returned after Katrina, they would make up only 8.6% of the January 2006 total population of 593,183.

Many, particularly the colonial Hispanics of St Bernard but also neo-colonial Hispanics living in St Bernard and Orleans Parishes, have suffered great losses and might well not return.

As the rebuilding effort began, however, newspaper reports claimed that *waves* of Hispanics, US permanent residents and citizens as well as undocumented workers, especially Mexicans but also Central and South Americans, were *flooding* into New Orleans in a human version of Katrina's storm surge.<sup>39</sup> As evidence, reporters cited the proliferation of Spanish signage, Hispanic food in supermarkets, taco trucks, Mexican and Central American money wiring services, increasing advertisements on Radio Tropical Caliente, establishment of an Azteca America television station, greater Hispanic enrollment in schools, more demand for bilingual employees, proliferation of English classes for Hispanics, and the growing number of Spanish speaking patients at health clinics.<sup>40</sup>

By June 2006, a joint study by Tulane University and the University of California at Berkeley based on 212 random work-place interviews in Orleans Parish as well as key informant interviews and targeted sampling over a broader area during March 2006, had begun to characterize the influx of Hispanics and highlight their low pay, lack of benefits, and unsafe working and living conditions.<sup>41</sup> One of the investigators concluded that the new Hispanic construction workers numbered 10,000–14,000.<sup>42</sup> In rough terms, allowing for the method used, some 93% of all reconstruction workers were male; 50% had been in New Orleans six months or less, having come after Katrina; 45% were Hispanic; 54% of the Hispanics were undocumented; and 66% of the Hispanics had arrived in New Orleans (post-)K. Among the undocumented workers alone, 100% of whom were Hispanic, 75% had been in New Orleans six months or less; 87% were already in the United States before moving to New Orleans; 41% of them from Texas; and in terms of national origins 43% were originally from Mexico, 32% Honduras, 9% Nicaragua, 8% El Salvador, and 8% other places of the Hispanic Atlantic. Martín Gutiérrez, Director of the Ministerio Hispano of the Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans, confirms that those he has worked with over the past year generally reflect that demographic profile.<sup>43</sup>

The 2006 Louisiana Health and Population Survey, conducted during June-October of that year and based on a sample of 400 households, provided the first relatively good (post-)K population data for the four parishes, including their Hispanics.<sup>44</sup> Total populations seemed, again allowing for the method used, to have recovered only slightly since the January 2006 Census Bureau special estimate: Jefferson Parish had done the best, moving from 411,305 to 434,666, down only 3.1% from the pre-K special estimate; Plaquemines Parish had gone from 20,164 to 20,024, seemingly stagnant at a decline of some 29%; Orleans Parish had increased from 158,353 to 191,139, still down a dramatic 56%; St Bernard Parish had recovered substantial population, going from 3,361 to 25,296, but even so reaching only 39% of its pre-K population; and the four-parish area as a whole had moved up from 593,183 to 671,125, still down some 34%. Such estimates based on household surveys cannot strictly compare with Census 2000 and have large margins of error, ranging from 9.8–36.3%, but nonetheless do provide essential data.

The same survey estimated the population of "Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin" for each of the four parishes.<sup>45</sup> Orleans Parish had 18,303, 9.6% of its total population; Jefferson Parish had 41,966, making up 9.7%; Plaquemines had 1,093, for 5.5%; St Bernard had 1,401, for 5.5%; and the four-parish area as a whole had 62,763, some 9.4% of the 671,125 total. Despite the lack of commensurability with previous estimates, recognizing that such household surveys underestimate their figures due to an exclusion of people living in hotels, motels, shelters, and other types of housing possibly favored by migratory

workers, and noting the consequent margins of error ranging from 3.3-3.8%, the survey seems to indicate that by June-October 2006 New Orleans had gained many new Hispanics, 11,661 overall, an increase of 23% relative to the 51,102 of Census 2000. Some 9,548 had moved into Jefferson Parish, for an increase of nearly 30%. Orleans Parish followed with a gain of 3,477, an increase of about 24%. Plaquemines Parish gained only 660, but that represented a 252% increase. Only St Bernard Parish had an absolute decline, a loss of 2,024 or 59%. The proportions of Hispanics in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes in particular were notably higher relative to Census 2000, respectively going from 3.2% and 7.1% to nearly a tenth of their total populations. Some of that increase might represent relocation by the 2,024 Hispanics lost from St Bernard Parish, but much must have been part of the influx of largely male migrant workers, many undocumented, dominated by those of Mexican and Central American origin, many by way of Texas.<sup>46</sup>

Despite those two surveys, the new Hispanic component of the New Orleans population remains largely unknown. Clearly, it represents a small part of the national phenomenon of a surging Hispanic population, much with Mexican origins, and therefore relates to what one geographer has labeled magical urbanism.<sup>47</sup> The processes involved in that phenomenon are transnational, with migrants remaining deeply involved with the people, politics, and traditions of their place of origin despite being similarly involved in U.S. communities. The life stories that Samantha Euraque collected among the Hondurans of New Orleans for her 2004 thesis reveal that those pre-K neo-colonial Hispanics displayed some such transnational characteristics, but not to the degree that economic and cultural “umbilical cords” connect some neighborhoods in, for example, Los Angeles and Mexico City.<sup>48</sup>

Fieldwork somewhat elaborates on the foregoing spatial analysis of census and survey data. The day-laborer pick-up places have become a new, Hispanic-dominated element of the landscape, whether at Lee circle or the parking lots of various gas stations and building supply stores. The large influx of Hispanics into Jefferson Parish, despite representing an increase of nearly 30% over the 32,418 enumerated during Census 2000, seems to have been largely absorbed by the existing Hispanic population and services such as supermercados, although the large Celina’s International Supermarket on Williams Boulevard opened in the Spring of 2006 in response to the increased demand for Hispanic food and services. The gain of 3,477 Hispanics in Orleans Parish seems to be concentrated in New Orleans East, especially in the neighborhood known as Versailles, Village de L’Est, or Little Vietnam just off Chef Menteur Highway near the NASA Michoud facility – a concentration of Catholic Vietnamese immigrants since the 1970s. There, a Hispanic restaurant and store have opened in former Vietnamese businesses to cater to the new (post-)K Hispanics who are reconstructing the badly flooded New Orleans East neighborhoods. The Mexican-Americans who run the Taquería México, formerly the Bien Tinh (Ocean Love) restaurant, are from Houston and also run some taco trucks, or *loncheras*, to serve the demand for lunch among reconstruction workers (Figure 4). The Vietnamese stores in Village de L’Est now also stock Hispanic food items and phone cards as well as providing money transfer services. Hispanics attend the Vietnam Catholic Church, where mass is currently in Vietnamese but with a Spanish one planned for the near future.<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusions: Geographic methodological contributions

The question of whether (post-)K New Orleans is emerging as a Hispanic place in contrast to its predominant pre-K associations with the Black and French Atlantics merely provided a substantive fulcrum for this methodological case study. Its primary purpose has



Figure 4. Signs of (post-)Katrina times in Village de L'Est, or Little Vietnam (photograph by author; 02.22.07). Taquería México is in red letters on a white background, Bien Tinh the opposite.

been to explore and illustrate some types of methodological approaches geographers can contribute to Atlantic Studies. One approach has used spatial analysis of data, whether social survey data such as census enumerations, environmental data such as flood depth and persistence, or others. Another has used fieldwork that combines informal interviews with observation of landscape elements, both those diagnostic of past relational processes and those suggestive of emerging ones. The third has used analysis of long-term dynamics in the relationships among places, in this particular case New Orleans, the Canary Islands, Honduras, and so on. That mix of methods has made understandable some of the processes driving the emerging Hispanic geography of (post-)K New Orleans.

For example, only combining those approaches makes clear that the Hispanic population of New Orleans that Census 2000 measured includes people related to two quite different general relationships with the Hispanic Atlantic, each with a unique spatial distribution that interacted with the spatial distribution of hurricane-related flooding and the new transnational processes relating the United States to the Hispanic Atlantic to establish a (post-)K Hispanic concentration in New Orleans East. Census 2000 suggests that 5.1% of the population of St Bernard Parish was then Hispanic or Latino, somewhat higher than the 3.2% for Orleans Parish and somewhat lower than the 7.1% for Jefferson Parish. Both Orleans Parish and St. Bernard Parish suffered massive flood damage, have reconstruction jobs available and unreconstructed housing in which to squat. Yet many of the (post-)K Hispanic in-migrants seem to have settled in Jefferson Parish and New Orleans East in preference to St Bernard Parish out of affinity for the circuits of neo-colonial rather than colonial networks. In fact, the new Hispanics relate less to colonial, *Isleño* Hispanics than to the neo-colonial Vietnamese community with its established access to the international communications and money transfer networks so necessary to the transnational processes involved in the influx of new Hispanics.<sup>50</sup>

The question of whether (post-)K New Orleans is emerging as a Hispanic place thus begins to become much more meaningful than the categorical claims to date have suggested. They have focused on the increase in the proportion of a social survey category termed Hispanic, from 5% in 2000 to 9.4% in 2006. Besides being a relatively minor increase relative to those for the United States as a whole or for the New Latino South, more essentially, that category and the people who self-identify with it are all involved in long-term, dynamic processes relating New Orleans, Honduras, Mexico, the Canary Islands, Vietnam, and many other places. How many people will self-identify as Hispanic in New Orleans during Census 2010 remains unpredictable because of the complexity of those processes. However, even once completed, that enumeration will only have meaning

as a measure of the shifting location of New Orleans within the network of relations that comprise the Hispanic Atlantic.

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### Notes

1. Lewis and Wigen, "A Maritime Response"; Bailyn, *Atlantic History*; Boelhower, "I'll Teach You How to Flow."
2. Quoted in Campo-Flores, "A New Spice."
3. Quoted in Campo-Flores, "A New Spice."
4. US Census Bureau, "American FactFinder"; Louisiana Public Health Institute, "2006 Health and Population Survey."
5. Quoted in Waller, "In the Wake of Katrina."
6. Gyan, "Immigrants Helping Rebuild," emphasis added.
7. US Census Bureau, "American FactFinder."
8. Sluyter, *Colonialism and Landscape*; Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World*.
9. For a relevant geographical example, see Colten, *Unnatural Metropolis*.
10. Berger, *Under Northern Eyes*.
11. For an example from geography, see Carney, *Black Rice*.
12. Smith, "Coming of Age in Creole New Orleans."
13. Therrien and Ramirez, *The Hispanic Population in the United States*.
14. Gibson and Jung, *Historical Census Statistics*.
15. Making such methods accessible to readers of an interdisciplinary journal requires foregoing presentation of tract-level choropleth and flood-depth contour maps, statistical models and measures, and so on in favor of narrative and a single, highly generalized map; however, the detailed data, geographic information system output, and other underpinning materials are available on request from the author.
16. Campanella, *Geographies of New Orleans*, 5–9.
17. Campanella, *Geographies of New Orleans*, 106–17.
18. Din, *The Canary Islanders*.
19. Parsons, "Migration of Canary Islanders."
20. US Census Bureau, "American FactFinder"; four-parish area refers to Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, and St Bernard parishes.
21. Gibson, *Population of the 100 Largest Cities*.
22. Carpenter, *Gateway to the Americas*.
23. Striffler and Moberg, *Banana Wars*.
24. Euraque, "Honduran Memories," 16; Campanella, *Geographies of New Orleans*, 243, 369–80.
25. Lewis, *New Orleans*, 78–80, 83–4.
26. US Census Bureau, "American FactFinder."
27. Therrien and Ramirez, *The Hispanic Population in the United States*, 1.

28. US Census Bureau, "American FactFinder."
29. Therrien and Ramirez, *The Hispanic Population in the United States*, 1.
30. Suro and Singer, *Latino Growth in Metropolitan America*, 4.
31. Smith, *The New Latino South*.
32. Suro and Singer, *Latino Growth in Metropolitan America*, 12.
33. Martín Gutiérrez, conversation of 03.15.07.
34. Campanella, *Geographies of New Orleans*.
35. Marigny Hyland, Lopez Ramos, and LeBlanc, "Report About the State of the Canarian Descendants."
36. Scallan, "Amid Political Squabble"; Swerczek, "Razing of Apartments."
37. Campanella, *Geographies of New Orleans*, 400-401.
38. US Census Bureau, "American FactFinder"; Frey and Singer, *Katrina and Rita Impacts*.
39. Roig-Franzia, "In New Orleans"; Campo-Flores, "A New Spice."
40. Waller, "In the Wake of Katrina"; Moreno, "Taco Trucks Add New Dimension."
41. Fletcher, Pham, Stover, and Vinck, *Rebuilding After Katrina*; Belsie and Axtman, "Post-Katrina New Orleans."
42. Eaton, "Study Sees Increase."
43. Martín Gutiérrez, conversation of 03.15.07.
44. Louisiana Public Health Institute, "2006 Health and Population Survey."
45. Louisiana Public Health Institute, "2006 Health and Population Survey."
46. Fletcher et al., *Rebuilding After Katrina*; Belsie and Axtman, "Post-Katrina New Orleans."
47. Davis, *Magical Urbanism*.
48. Euraque, "Honduran Memories," 16; Davis, *Magical Urbanism*, in which the umbilical cord metaphor refers to electronic money transfers, e-mail, calling cards, video chat, and other technologies that facilitate rapid and cumulatively large financial and information flows that make some US neighborhoods into functional suburbs of places like Mexico City and vice versa.
49. Martín Gutiérrez, conversation of 03.15.07.
50. Davis, *Magical Urbanism*.

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