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## Book Review: Remaking New Orleans: Beyond Exceptionalism and Authenticity

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*Remaking New Orleans: Beyond Exceptionalism and Authenticity.* Ed. by Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. x, 358 pp. Cloth, \$104.95. Paper, \$27.95.)

*Remaking New Orleans* is a collection of fourteen essays that examine how preoccupations with exceptionality and authenticity have clouded popular and scholarly understandings of historical and contemporary New Orleans. The editors Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny and their contributors offer a welcome, convincing, and overdue rebuke of representations of New Orleans as a city lying outside broader contexts. This anthology serves as a sophisticated primer for how scholars can enrich the study of New Orleans by eschewing uncritical assumptions of its uniqueness.

Following an introduction that outlines the creation, perpetuation, and problematic nature of New Orleans's purported exceptionality and authenticity, the volume consists of four sections. The first two, collectively spanning colonial to post Hurricane Katrina New Orleans, focus, respectively, on the figurative construction of the city's identity as exceptional and as authentic. Perhaps most compelling for historians are the essays that elucidate why the French creole conception of the city prevailed over other conceptions. Shannon Lee Dawdy reveals long-standing connections between Mexico and New Orleans and accounts for the marginalization of Mexicans in the city's identity. Rien Fertel explains the role of nineteenth-century historian Charles Gayarre in shaping an identity in which Dawdy's *mexicanidad* had no currency. Helen A. Regis's essay furthers readers' understanding of how constructions of the city as creole, while having receded, shaped later constructions of belonging defined by participation in local cultural practices or pre-Katrina residency. Other essays fit less clearly but still offer important insights. Notably, Bryan Wagner connects New Orleans to broader histories of urban renewal and displacement by revealing how the nation's first African American professional wrestling headliner enacted story lines in the ring that spoke to black New Orleanians displaced from the Tremé neighborhood surrounding the arena where they gathered to watch the spectacle.

The third section's essays reexamine groups that have been misunderstood or marginalized in histories of the city. Alecia P. Long's essay challenges assumptions of a sexually permissive city by showing that gay men in the French Quarter had to endure discriminatory actions by police, reformers, and preservation-

ists, who took cues from counterparts in other cities. Vern Baxter and Maria Casati historicize the experience of suburban middle-class African Americans in a city often portrayed in simplistic, rich-white-poor-black binaries. Marguerite Nguyen places Vietnamese immigrants firmly within post-Katrina New Orleans politics and society. She connects them to a longer Asian history of the city and, through their urban farming, to a broader Vietnamese diaspora.

The fourth section's essays illuminate how exceptionality and authenticity reinforce post-disaster New Orleans as a model city for enactments of neoliberal policy. From the channeling of federal funds toward downtown development in the 1970s to the replacement of the liberal state with privatized volunteerism, these essays implicate the city's alleged exceptionalism and authenticity in obscuring and enabling neoliberal agendas.

While historians may labor to excavate insights from some essays in which disciplinary preoccupations obscure as much as they reveal, *Remaking New Orleans* succeeds in rendering an indictment against seeing this city as exceptional rather than exemplary.

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