

GSURC Abstract  
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## Yoking the Exotic: Influence, Identity, and the Politics of Representation in the Reconstruction of Historic New Orleans

How is a specific version of history codified through the built environment and accepted by future generations? This paper surveys the politics of representation and identity portrayal amidst districting and changes in the built environment during Reconstruction-era New Orleans to elucidate the mechanisms of social memory construction during contentious times.

In an attempt to aid in the understanding of the politics of representation and historical memory making within urban centers, this research draws on theoretical concepts inspired by Foucault (1980; 1986) and Debord (1968) along with many others in analyzing social reconstruction in the aftermath of political upheaval, specifically in the restoration of the built environment. This paper examines how the built environment offers a sense of place and identity and how this can be steered to reflect a set of chosen values, especially during times of drastic socioeconomic instability. Through analysis of archival maps, policy, and historical personal accounts along with observation of the political maneuvering seen with redistricting and aesthetic rules, I argue that the values, ideals, and identity of the elite or policy-activists can be interpreted as they are represented within the built environment. By examining the tactics and strategies that social groups have enacted to codify certain viewpoints and values, this paper reviews how the implications of these value systems are seen in the cultural constructs and institutions that have been used over time to generate revenue while also spawning local industries of historical tourism to both justify and codify these views as history. This information is employed to trace the direct, conscious changes to the urban built environment, revealing how the production and representation of space has acted as a framework for identity and the survival of selected cultural values. Using New Orleans from the Restoration through the economic recovery programs of the 1940s as a case study within a larger project, this paper reveals how political strategy and social cohesion meet to literally construct history and encode a desired urban identity.