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## Introduction

### *Authentic New Orleans*

In the days following the devastation unleashed by Hurricane Katrina, media outlets from around the world broadcasted riveting images of stranded residents, widespread physical damage, and flooded neighborhoods. News coverage of the aftermath revealed that the vast majority of people left behind in New Orleans were poor, African American, and elderly. Subsequent analysis confirmed the unequal effect of the hurricane's damage, showing that almost one-half of the people living in damaged areas were African American and over 45 percent of homes were occupied by renters.<sup>1</sup> Since the hurricane, residents have been returning to the city, even though physical destruction is widespread. The process of rebuilding the economic base, public school systems, legal and government infrastructures, and transportation systems is likely to take years.

The demographic and population consequences of the evacuation of tens of thousands of people remain unclear. The physical damage was extensive and uneven. Some of New Orleans's famous tourist attractions like the French Quarter and the Audubon Zoo suffered little negative impact from the hurricane, whereas others such as City Park and the city's famous cemeteries experienced major damage. Moreover, while the Uptown area and Garden District neighborhood escaped severe flooding, other neighborhoods such as the Ninth Ward, Treme, Marigny, and Broadmoor remained largely unoccupied months after the storm. Katrina's forced displacement of residents and destruction has not only exposed the fault lines of race and class but also inspired debate over whether New Orleans's rich culture and distinctive authenticity have been lost forever. No one knows what will come of the dispersal of New Orleans's music and artistic life, or whether the thousands of artists and musical transients will become transplants.

Since the havoc, journalists, scholars, and others have presented the world with at least three contrasting scenarios for New Orleans's future, scenarios that reflect different interpretations of the city's past development as a tourist destination. One interpretation views the city as a twenty-first-century Pompeii, where the ravages of Katrina have wiped clean the enriching and vibrant culture that used to undergird and support a flourishing tourism sector. According to popular writer Anne Rice, Hurricane Katrina "has done what racism couldn't do, and what segregation couldn't do either. Nature has laid the city waste—with a scope that brings to mind the end of Pompeii."<sup>2</sup> Displaced musicians, preservationists, and others assert that what made New Orleans unique was the unbroken traditions of jazz music, creole architecture, and delicious cuisine. "The flavor and physical setting of the city's culture is locked up in the vernacular wooden houses of the nineteenth century," according to historian S. Frederick Starr, "and I fear from them now. [Are city officials] going to seize on this as an opportunity for mass demolition, in order to build something akin to Houston?"<sup>3</sup> "It's Armageddon for the culture," according to one New Orleans pianist; "it's the ephemeral folk expression in New Orleans that is gone," echoes one archeologist.<sup>4</sup> In an op-ed piece titled "Requiem for the Crescent City," *Washington Post* journalist Eugene Robinson eulogized that the "old New Orleans is dead" because "the people who made it special are gone and so is the path for them to come back."<sup>5</sup> "In 2025, I can practically write the tourist-guide spiel," according to local architect Allen Eskew; "the dark history will be buried, along with the black bodies. And that means a lot of black culture will be buried along with it."<sup>6</sup> These views suggest that the scattering of residents throughout the nation has eroded the tight-knit communities that used to be the seedbeds of cultural invention in the city. In this scenario, the rebuilding of New Orleans will be akin to the banalization of the city and its transformation into a culturally empty place divested of authenticity and communal value.

A second interpretation is that a reconstructed New Orleans will emerge, one displaying the features of a Disney theme park or Las Vegas-style entertainment destination. In this vision of the future, the resurrected city will be sanitized of its past charm and turned into a culturally and ethnically homogenous city that is an artificial and contrived version of its old urban self. "Will this quirky and endlessly fascinating place become an X-rated theme park, a Disneyland for adults?" Tulane

University history professor Larry Powell asked in a speech. “Is it fated to be the place where Orlando embraces Las Vegas? That’s the American Pompeii I apprehend rising from the toxic sludge deposited by Lake Ponchartrain: an ersatz city, veritable site of schlock and awe.”<sup>7</sup> According to filmmaker Ken Burns, the “spectacular vernacular architecture is all but destroyed. . . . I’m worried the money will come pouring in and what we’ll wind up with is a bigger, gaudier New Orleans, like Las Vegas.”<sup>8</sup>

In this interpretation, people worry about the taming of New Orleans’s improvisational impulse and the loss of creative culture embodied in the characters and eccentrics that once populated the city’s neighborhoods. “New Orleans is the most African of American cities, and those who have been displaced and potentially have the fewer resources to return are a core of this culture,” according to Danille Taylor, dean of humanities at Dillard University. “It’ll be a Disneyland if those people aren’t there.”<sup>9</sup> This sense of unease is fueled by the slow progress of rebuilding and eerie rumors that city leaders are courting global entertainment chains and casinos to locate to New Orleans to supply the capital to rebuild the city. Mayor C. Ray Nagin’s initial proposal to create a casino district to stimulate rebuilding was quickly retracted in the face of intense opposition by local groups and the state governor’s office. “They’re trying to mold this city into a pseudo-Disneyland, gambling center, party center, a facade,” remarked one local artist. “I . . . fear the Disneyfication of the French Quarter with all this money: people coming and buying up bars, music clubs, old restaurants—and naming drinks ‘Katrina,’” complained another resident.<sup>10</sup> These lamentations reflect a feeling that the 20 percent of the city that did not flood, including the Uptown area and French Quarter, will retain their tourist appeal and anchor the broader transformation of the city into a Disney-like theme park to entertain visitors. In this scenario, the cultural richness of pre-Katrina New Orleans will become a fossilized relic to amuse visitors.

A third interpretation views post-Katrina rebuilding as helping to foster a new appreciation and rebirth of local culture that will enliven and mobilize people to create new bases of urban authenticity. While some residents are deeply cynical and pessimistic about the future, others are hopeful that the distinctive way of life that residents nurtured for generations will act to stimulate and support a phoenix-like recovery that will animate and reinvent local heritage. “The New Orleans Area is

steeped in tradition, but it is also a place that re-invents itself when need be,” according to the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* newspaper.<sup>11</sup> Long-term residents and people who love the city have long championed New Orleans as one of the last authentic places in the nation. These people maintain that New Orleans’s unique sense of culture and place has been the bulwark against the homogenizing tendencies that have overtaken metropolitan America. While the spread of suburban-style strip malls, theme parks, chain stores, and other standardized and generic experiences have come to define many places, New Orleans has been a cultural “other” that has managed to retain an individuality and authenticity of its own. New Orleans is “a citadel against the McNuggeting of America. It seemed to resist the homogenization seen in many cities,” according to *Denver Post* journalist William Porter. “For me, New Orleans is one of the few authentic places left in our landscape, and that compounds the tragedy,” remarks filmmaker Ken Burns. “No other city is so equipped to deal with [Hurricane Katrina],” according to Louis Edwards, novelist and associate producer of the Jazz and Heritage Festival. “Think of the jazz funeral. . . . In New Orleans we respond to the concept of following tragedy with joy. That’s a powerful philosophy to have as the underpinning of your culture.”<sup>12</sup>

In the months since Katrina roared ashore, a plethora of books and articles have appeared proclaiming New Orleans to be one of America’s most beloved cities. Titles such as *My New Orleans: Ballads to the Big Easy by Her Sons, Daughters, and Lovers*; *Why New Orleans Matters*; and *Very New Orleans: A Celebration of History, Culture, and Cajun Country Charm* serve as timely and timeless tributes to the powerful spirit that defines the city. On the local level, a quiet but urgent conversation about New Orleans’s cultural survival and its sense of authenticity radiates through city streets and major institutions. Prognostications about loss and decline juxtapose with tales of resilience and strength in the face of adversity. While to some the future looks bleak and the city will never be the same, others look to the Katrina tragedy as an opportunity to face the quintessential challenge of rebuilding and reinventing the cultural heart of America.

Questions about New Orleans’s future are intertwined with symbols of solidarity and division that seek to make explicit, and more comprehensible, a city’s conflicting conceptions of itself and its past. In writing this book, I try to illuminate the interlocking nature of conflicts over

race, culture, and authenticity in New Orleans and trace historically how tourism practices have displayed and articulated these conflicts. For more than a century, New Orleans has been a complex and constantly mutating city in which meanings of place and community have been inexorably intertwined with tourism practices. This book examines the historical growth and expansion of the tourism industry in New Orleans, the role of tourism in transmitting symbols of local culture and authenticity, and the influence of race and racial inequalities on tourism practices. For decades, scholars have derided tourism as a global process of standardization and cultural homogenization that annihilates the unique features and genuineness of places and creates what sociologist Dean MacCannell calls “staged” authenticity.<sup>13</sup> Others have viewed tourism as a set of discrete economic activities, a mode of consumption, or a spatially bounded locality or “destination” that is subject to external forces producing impacts. In contrast, I view tourism as a highly complex set of institutions and social relations that involve capitalist markets; state policy; and flows of commodities, cultural forms, and people. In this conception, tourism is not exogenous to localities but is embedded within broader patterns of metropolitan development and sociospatial inequality. My goal is to investigate the processes of authentication through which different groups and interests make claims for local authenticity and attempt to legitimate their constructions of race and culture. I examine the historical development of racial meanings of local authenticity, analyze how conflicts over tourism have changed over time, and address wider issues concerning the relationship between tourism and the construction of place identity.

The connections between race, culture, and tourism are important for understanding the historical development of New Orleans and its future in the aftermath of Katrina. Terms such as “whiteness,” “blackness,” “creole,” “diversity,” and “multiculturalism” have long been major signifiers of local identity, as well as sources of division and conflict. Today, these categories are fueling local and national debates over who owns New Orleans, which groups should be allowed to return, and how the city should be rebuilt. Likewise, discussions about the role of tourism in the rebuilding process are sparking conflict over which cultural symbols and images reflect the “authentic” New Orleans and who should define what is local authenticity. Popular discussions frequently employ reified and stereotyped designations that obscure the

historically changing nature of race, culture, and place. Scholars have pointed out that race and culture are socially constructed categories that have an emergent and variable quality rather than being fixed or immutable group characteristics.<sup>14</sup> In New Orleans, racial and ethnic group distinctions, as well as cultural designations, have always been politically contested and subject to intense debate and protest. Moreover, the constructed and contingent nature of race and culture have been reinforced by the inherently fluid, situational, and fabricated nature of authenticity.<sup>15</sup> Authenticity is a notoriously labyrinthine concept that can refer to a variety of idealized representations of culture, identity, place. While authenticity may be a socially constructed representation of reality, it has always been real in its consequences as different groups and organized interests have struggled to create and legitimate meanings of an authentic New Orleans. Broadly, in this book I seek to provide deep understanding into the changing role of tourism discourses and practices in the creation and transformation of New Orleans's urban iconography.<sup>16</sup>

Historians such as Catherine Cocks, Jane C. Desmond, Harvey Newman, Hal Rothman, John F. Sears, and Marguerite S. Shaffer, among others, have unearthed a wealth of data that describe the role tourism has played in the development of national and local identities and in places of cultural significance.<sup>17</sup> Yet many of these historical accounts lack empirical specificity and have made little progress in theorizing the development of tourism and its attendant spatial manifestations. Moreover, many accounts of tourism present it as either primarily negative (a destroyer of cultures and local traditions) or primarily positive (bringing a wealth of new products, ideas, and economic opportunities to people). Thus, the historical trajectories and path dependencies of tourism development remain underresearched, both empirically and theoretically. Another problem is the lack of serious examination of the connections between race and tourism. Many studies merely assert the importance of race and racial discrimination without an appreciation of their socially constructed and changing meanings. In this book, I analyze the changing linkages between tourism and race to show how specific racial meanings and manifestations of discrimination were institutionalized within the tourism industry during the twentieth century. At the same time, I examine the role of social movements and protest groups in using tourism discourses and practices to challenge social inequalities and contest marginalization.

### *Tourism from Above and Below*

A major goal in this book is to develop a theoretically driven explanation of the historical development of tourism and its articulation with local actions and broader socioeconomic processes. For years, scholars have assailed tourism as a force of globalization that hollows out the rich texture and distinctiveness of local relations and their creations, and thereby corrupts authentic cultural spaces.<sup>18</sup> According to critics, tourism transforms local culture into abstract, manufactured, and simulated social forms that are estranged from communal life and devoid of authenticity. Other more celebratory accounts have viewed tourism as a force of diversification that promotes cultural invention and innovation.<sup>19</sup> Rather than embracing either/or explanations of tourism, I develop a both/and conceptualization that views tourism as an amalgam of both homogenizing forces of sameness and uniformity, and diversifying forces of difference and hybridity. I advance this conceptualization by distinguishing between *tourism from above* and *tourism from below*, a distinction that can help us get a better sense of how tourism can promote as well as destabilize and undermine local traditions and cultures.

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 present a schematic overview of the major processes, structures and networks, and key actors and organizations in New Orleans associated with tourism above and below. Broadly, tourism from above and tourism from below are not independently given sets of phenomena (a dualism) but a duality; they are an interplay that presupposes each other. Thus, tourism from above processes do not exist “apart” from localities but are embedded in networks and organizations that facilitate some forms of action and decision making in particular locales while discouraging others. To be specific, tourism from above and below and their related processes exist in a reciprocal and reflexive relationship. Grasping that tourism embodies contrasting tendencies at once—that it can be a force of homogenization and heterogeneity, globalization and localization—is crucial to articulating the multiple dimensions of tourism and avoiding one-sided and reductive conceptions.

Tourism from above draws our attention to the role of capital flows, communication and transportation technologies, and legal modes of governance and regulation that have evolved over time to encourage travel and coordinate different forms of tourism and entertainment. The concept also refers to a mix of the extralocal processes of globalization,

TABLE I.1  
*Topology of Tourism from Above*

<i>Processes</i>	<i>Structures and Networks</i>	<i>Key Actors and Organizations in New Orleans</i>
Globalization Commodification Rationalization Disneyization Branding	<p>International Tourism Networks and Associations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World Tourism Organization (WTO)</li> <li>• International Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (IACVB)</li> <li>• Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI)</li> <li>• International Hotel and Restaurant Association (IH&amp;RA)</li> <li>• Hospitality Financial Technology Professionals (HFTP)</li> <li>• International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (ICHRIE)</li> <li>• Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA)</li> <li>• Destination Marketing International (DMI)</li> <li>• World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)</li> <li>• International Ecotourism Society (TIES)</li> <li>• World Tourism Foundation (WTF)</li> </ul> <p>U.S. Tourism Networks and Associations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Resort Development Association (ARDA)</li> <li>• American Hotel &amp; Lodging Association (AH&amp;LA)</li> <li>• Travel Industry Association of America (TIA)</li> </ul> <p>Public-Private Networks (government, corporations, and private nonprofit organizations):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Government Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (OTTI)</li> <li>• State government offices of tourism and cultural development</li> <li>• City government tourism agencies and regulatory bodies</li> <li>• Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs)</li> <li>• Tourism marketing corporations</li> <li>• Chain hotel &amp; entertainment firms</li> <li>• Schools of hospitality and tourism business</li> </ul>	<p>New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOMCVB)            New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation (NOTMC)            New Orleans Multicultural Tourism Network (NOMTN)            New Orleans Sports Foundation            New Orleans Hotel-Motel Association            Audubon Institute            Harrah's Casino and other gambling establishments            New Orleans City Council; departments and offices of economic development: tourism, film, art, music; historic and cultural district regulatory commissions, etc.</p>

TABLE 1.2  
*Topology of Tourism from Below*

<i>Processes</i>	<i>Structures and Networks</i>	<i>Key Actors and Organizations in New Orleans</i>
Localization Hybridization Creolization Distinctiveness Heterogeneity	<p>Aesthetic networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts councils, galleries, and museums</li> <li>• Grassroots cultural organizations (art, music, cuisine)</li> <li>• Schools of art, music, cuisine</li> </ul> <p>Residential networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood coalitions</li> <li>• Resident associations</li> </ul> <p>Heritage networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local historical societies</li> <li>• Music heritage foundations</li> <li>• Local historic preservation organizations</li> <li>• Festival volunteer organizations</li> </ul> <p>Media networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community radio stations</li> <li>• Local newspapers</li> <li>• Public television stations</li> </ul>	Arts Council of New Orleans Community Arts Center (CAC) Preservation Resource Center (PRC) Save Our Cemeteries Carnival Krewees French Quarter Festivals, Inc. Jazz and Heritage Foundation New Orleans Music Colloquium New Orleans Jazz Orchestra Urban Conservancy

commodification, rationalization, Disneyization, and branding that are historically changing and uneven. *Globalization* implies the intensification of social and geographical interconnectedness and an accelerated circulation of people, capital, information, and cultural symbols on a worldwide scale. *Commodification* is the conversion of local products, cultures, and social relations and identities into saleable products that are sold on markets for profitable exchange. *Rationalization* refers to a process in which social actions and interactions are based on considerations of efficiency and calculation rather than on motivations derived from custom, tradition, or emotion. Specifically, rationalization is a long yet uneven historical process of applying formal planning, systematic organization, and sophisticated technology to enhance the tourist appeal of local cultures, traditions, and products. *Disneyization* refers to the spread of theme-park characteristics to cities and the increased use of theming techniques, the promotion of corporate brands, and the dominance of security and surveillance in the production of entertainment spaces.<sup>20</sup> Urban *branding* is the most recent extension of the commodification and rationalization process associated with tourism from above and implies the marketing of a corporate-oriented version of urban culture as an object of consumption. The significance of branding, as opposed to advertising and conventional place promotion, is that the distinction between the real city and imagined city implodes and advertised representations become the indicators and definers of urban reality. The branded city establishes and reproduces an infinite set of referentials between entertaining products, spectacular images, and pleasurable experiences in which one referent connects with all the other through highly charged associations across time and space.<sup>21</sup>

Tourism from below refers to the range of framing strategies, symbols, aesthetic codes, and other expressive resources that local people and groups create and use in everyday life to stimulate cultural invention, construct local authenticity, and promote tourism at a grassroots level. Several scholars have used the term “glocalization” to emphasize the integration of the global-local and of homogeneity-heterogeneity in the development of transnational processes.<sup>22</sup> Glocalization is akin to “hybridization” and refers to the intersection of global processes with local actions that result in novel and unique cultural creations in different geographic areas. A similar term, “localization,” can be defined as a process by which local actors and organizations appropriate “global” imagery and symbols to reinforce “local” sentiments and in-

scribe “local” meanings into products and cultural creations. The term “creolization” appears in writings on globalization and postmodernity to explain the mixing of different cultures and identities in an age of migration and enhanced mobility. Scholars have also used creolization to refer to both cultural mixing and cultural adaptation, as different groups assimilate themselves to living in a new environment.<sup>23</sup> What has not been the subject of much research is how grassroots organizations and other local groups have used tourism institutions and practices to construct “glocal” cultures and place identities. While researchers argue that local authenticities are always hybrid and can result from creolization, it is not clear how extralocal processes interconnect with local actions to produce heterogeneity and diversity. In short, tourism from below draws our attention to how seemingly remote and distant processes are mediated at various spatial and institutional levels, from the macrolevel of globalized institutions to the microlevel of people’s day-to-day lives. Such a perspective adjudicates between a top-down approach that stresses the role of global factors in driving tourism, and a bottom-up approach that focuses on the role of local influences and particularizing forces.

As a sensitizing device, the tourism from above and below heuristic suggests a set of relationships, including structures, networks, and organizations for illuminating the diverse connections between tourism and metropolitan development, urban culture, and constructions of authenticity.<sup>24</sup> The categories listed in tables 1.1 and 1.2 do not exhaust the historical possibilities, nor do they constitute a comprehensive framework to explain the development of tourism everywhere and at all times. The structures, networks, and organizations associated with tourism from above in table 1.1 have evolved since the nineteenth century to produce and coordinate travel flows and create different varieties of tourism. We could include railroads, airlines, travel firms, and many government agencies and regulatory bodies as major actors affiliated with tourism from above. For tourism from below, the key actors and organizations that I identify in table 1.2 are not the only actors that could be listed in the figure, but they are major forces in the promotion of local culture and have played strategic and important roles in defining the metropolitan area as a unique and distinctive place over the past half century. We could add a variety of historic landmarks commissions, historic preservationist societies, music commissions, and nonprofit organizations under the rubric of tourism from below. My goal is not to

identify every single actor and tourism organization but to analyze and explain the changing connections between the actors, structures and networks, and major processes.<sup>25</sup>

A major goal of this book is to apply and develop the tourism from above and below heuristic to illustrate the interactive relationships between the global and the local in the development of urban tourism. My investigation eschews a notion of the global and the local as abstract levels of analysis and concentrates on the linkages that constitute the global-local or micro-macro duality. On the one hand, I wish to understand the conditions under which tourism practices can reinforce trends toward the standardization and homogenization of culture and space. To do so, I examine the historical development of tourism organizations and marketing strategies and the role they have played in fabricating a touristic notion of authenticity to attract visitors to New Orleans. On the other hand, I wish to know whether tourism practices can generate and support cultural diversification and promote the growth of new identities and authenticities. To do so, I investigate the actions of local groups in harnessing and incorporating tourism discourses and practices into their tactics of cultural invention to help preserve longstanding traditions (localization) or help generate new traditions (hybridization or creolization).<sup>26</sup>

As sociologists of culture have noted, “tradition” is not just inherited from the past but is socially “constructed” through everyday social activities and practices, taking place amid material needs and social circumstances. Harvey Molotch, William Freudenberg, and Krista E. Paulsen’s work on the etiology of place character; Wendy Griswold and Nathan Wright’s work on the endurance of regional cultures; and Thomas Hylland Eriksen’s and Ulf Hannerz’s works on “creolization” suggest that the creation of traditions and other forms of cultural innovation are the result of recontextualization, mixing of different identities, and mergers of symbols.<sup>27</sup> This processual and hybrid view of culture draws attention to how the production and maintenance of cultures and traditions take places as people interact, create meaning, and produce and reproduce shared understandings of their behavior. This action-based approach views culture as fluid, situational, changeable, and emergent. What is important is not whether cultures or traditions are “real” or “authentic” but, rather, the ways that arguments about authenticity have been framed to influence public debate, contest policies, neutralize counterarguments and opposition, and mobilize constit-

uents. I am interested in how claims about culture, tradition, identity, and authenticity have often been interpreted and reshaped to fit the exigencies of the present, including local debates over tourism and its consequences. In short, the distinction of tourism from above and below eschews a notion of an “authentic place” corrupted by tourism and examines how tourism can be a mechanism for creating and maintaining place character, including articulating local identities and generating place-specific forms of collective action.

### *New Orleans Tourism before Hurricane Katrina*

New Orleans confronts us as a city of paradox, irony, and contradiction. Long known as the Crescent City, the metropolis has been condemned as a city of vice and decadence and celebrated as a place of joyous culture and unforgettable charm.<sup>28</sup> The New Orleans metropolitan statistical area has traditionally included Orleans Parish, Jefferson Parish, St. Bernard Parish, St. Charles Parish, and St. Tammany Parish (fig. 1.1). A county in the state of Louisiana is called a “parish.” Before the Hurricane Katrina disaster, the metropolitan area contained approximately 1.1 million residents. Tourism in the New Orleans metropolitan area has grown tremendously over the past century. In the early 1900s, river-based commerce, cotton trade, and a growing market for leisure and amusement dominated the New Orleans economy. During this time, sections of New Orleans became oriented toward leisure and entertainment: public parks, sports grounds, theaters, art galleries, shopping and so on. The city’s “red light” district and jazz culture left an indelible image in the minds of travelers and served for decades as a magnet to draw people to experience the “sin” industry. The discovery of oil in the early decades of the twentieth century spearheaded a tremendous growth of the chemical and petroleum industry, and by World War II, the city had established itself as a hub for military shipbuilding and manufacturing. Throughout the decades, political and economic elites promoted images of New Orleans as a charming city with beautiful and historic architecture, outstanding cuisine, excellent music, and Mardi Gras. By the middle of the century, the economy had a tripartite base made up of the oil industry, the port industry, and the tourism industry.<sup>29</sup> During the 1950s, New Orleans city officials and elites began devising strategies to increase tourist travel to enhance the economic pros-



Fig. 1.1. Greater New Orleans. (Reproduced by permission of Tulane University, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Special Collections)

perity and fiscal status of the central city. Dwindling urban population, the eroding manufacturing base, and burgeoning suburban development during the 1960s raised the specter of economic stagnation and created the context for city leaders to accelerate the development of tourism in the city.<sup>30</sup>

Over the decades, political and economic elites have forged close institutional links and developed several public-private partnerships in pursuit of tourism as a strategy to encourage inward investment and urban revitalization. This tourism strategy has included the building of a domed stadium, a festival mall, a massive convention center, new office towers in the Central Business District, a major theme park, and a World War II museum. The city has also staged many mega-events, including the 1984 World's Fair, periodic Super Bowls and (Nokia) Sugar Bowls, the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) basketball tournaments, the Jazz and Heritage Festival, the Essence Festival, and so on. The hotel industry has grown considerably over the past few dec-

ades, as indicated by the skyrocketing number of hotel rooms in the metropolitan area. The number of hotel rooms increased from 4,750 in 1960, to 10,686 in 1975 and 19,500 in 1985. In 1990, the metropolitan area had approximately 25,500 hotel/motel rooms. This figure increased to 28,000 in 1999 and to more than 33,000 by 2004. The convention market has also grown immensely since the 1960s. The city hosted 172 conventions in 1960; 1,000 conventions in 1975; 1,453 conventions in 1990; 2,485 conventions in 1995; and 3,556 conventions in 2000.<sup>31</sup> Overall convention attendance increased more than twenty times from 1960 to 2001, a development that reflects the growth of a tourism infrastructure of hotel and motel accommodations, restaurants, festival promotions, university programs in tourism management and service, professional sports, and so on. Other tourism developments that have occurred in the 1990s and later include the legalization of gaming in Louisiana, the creation of the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation (NOTMC), the establishment of the New Orleans Multicultural Tourism Network (NOMTN), the creation of the Mayor's Office of Tourism and Arts, and the expansion of Convention and Visitors Bureau efforts to market the region to international tourists.

New Orleans has long been known as a city with dramatic and troubling disparities. In 1960, the urban population peaked at 640,000 residents and declined in every decade thereafter. Between 1960 and 2000, the city lost a total of 156,000 people. Over the decades, weak job growth and the loss of jobs in the chemical and petroleum industries have depressed the metropolitan economic base and contributed to an 18 percent poverty rate in 2000, making New Orleans the sixth poorest of the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the nation. The region's class inequalities interlock with racial inequalities. In 1960, whites made up 62.6 percent of the city's population and blacks were 37.2 percent. As of the 2000 census, blacks made up 66.7 percent of the Central City's population, and whites were 26.6 percent (table 1.3). In 2005, blacks made up 84 percent of the city's poor population, with a high percentage living in segregated neighborhoods. According to the Brookings Institution, before Katrina, 43 percent of poor blacks in New Orleans lived in extreme poverty (census tracts with at least 40 percent of the population living below the federal poverty levels). In 2000, black median household income in the city was almost half the amount of white median income (\$21,461 as contrasted to \$40,390); the black poverty rate was more than three times higher than the white poverty rate (35

TABLE 1.3  
*Total and Racial Population in the New Orleans Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), Central City, and Suburban Areas (1980, 1990, and 2000)*

	Year	Total Population	White Population	Black Population	Hispanic Population	Other Races (non-Hispanic)
MSA	1980	1,303,800	814,193 62.4%	419,630 32.2%	50,961 3.9%	19,016 1.5%
	1990	1,285,270	762,697 59.3%	443,97 34.5%	152,53 4.1%	26,039 2.0%
	2000	1,337,270	731,514 54.7%	498,569 37.3%	58,454 4.4%	49,098 3.9%
Central City	1980	557,515	224,694 40.3%	304,673 54.6%	19,226 3.4%	8922 1.6%
	1990	496,938	164,457 33.1%	306,129 61.6%	15,900 3.2%	10,452 2.1%
	2000	484,674	128,871 26.6%	323,392 66.7%	14,826 3.1%	7,585 3.0%
Suburbs	1980	719,567	565,925 78.6%	112,643 15.7%	31,149 4.3%	9850 1.4%
	1990	764,208	577,583 75.6%	135,309 17.7%	36,034 4.7%	15,282 2.0%
	2000	827,357	581,772 70.3%	171,711 20.8%	43,032 5.2%	30,842 3.7%

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, 1980, 1990, and 2000. Data supplied by the State of the Cities Data System (SOCDS), <http://socds.huduser.org/>. Central City includes New Orleans, LA. Suburbs include all areas of the MSA outside of New Orleans, LA, and Slidell, LA.

percent compared with 11 percent); and poor blacks were almost four times as likely to live in areas with extreme poverty (43 percent of poor blacks lived in concentrated poverty while only 11 percent of poor whites did).<sup>32</sup> As result, by the time Katrina came ashore, New Orleans had become a place of glaring racial and class inequalities, a place where poor African Americans were segregated and spatially isolated from the rest of the population.

In short, over the past several decades New Orleans has experienced dramatic losses in urban population, stagnant incomes, and persistent poverty and racial inequality. These conditions reflect the multidecade erosion of the chemical and petroleum industry and port industry and the rise of a service sector tourism economy dominated by low-wage, nonunion jobs. In 1999, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics, New Orleans had 16,000 hospitality and hotel workers, with 90 percent of the workforce in the city being African American.<sup>33</sup> Over the past decade, trade unions have campaigned fiercely to organize New Orleans

hospitality workers, with the aim of increasing benefits and wages. Labor struggles in the hotel sector reached a crescendo in 2002 when voters overwhelmingly approved a city minimum wage hike to achieve a “living wage” for working people. This vote was dealt a major blow later in September 2002, when the Louisiana Supreme Court declared the living wage victory unconstitutional.<sup>34</sup> These battles are the most recent manifestations of the long history of class strife and racial struggle in New Orleans. Broadly, class and racial conflict in tourism illustrate the social relations of exploitation behind the production of tourist images and hospitality services. My historical examination highlights the changing nature of race and class in struggles over meanings of authenticity and explains how tourism practices are intimately linked with social inequalities.

### *Authentic New Orleans*

This book addresses the links between the past and present in New Orleans to explore the historical development of tourism with an eye to making discoveries that might be helpful in understanding the links between race, culture, and authenticity. While classic works such as John Urry’s *The Tourist Gaze* and Dean MacCannell’s *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* and *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* are extremely important, because of the broad and generalized perspective they bring to the study of tourism, the kind of rich detail and investigative specificity of a historical case study can offer a researcher empirical and theoretical gains in understanding larger social complexes of actors, actions, and motives.<sup>35</sup>

Case studies have a rich tradition in sociology and are becoming increasingly popular within urban scholarship on tourism, metropolitan development, and urban culture and politics, as illustrated by Mark Gottdiener, Claudia Collins, and David Dickens’s *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City*; Richard Lloyd’s *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*; Christopher Mele’s *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City*; and David Grazian’s *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs*.<sup>36</sup> This renewed interest in case study research comes from the increasing recognition that contextual factors specific to the city under study complicate cross-city generalizations about tourism.

Susan Fainstein and Dennis Judd suggest that local contextualities render the tourism process to have a relevant degree of place specificity: “Variation in the impacts of tourism and its multiple meanings . . . call for an examination of individual cases.”<sup>37</sup> As far as tourism is an expression of larger social, economic, and political relations, the development of tourism in any particular city will express the particularities of the place in the making of its urban space. In short, place matters in the study of tourism because an analysis of *why* and *how* tourism develops will need to take into account *where* and *when* it develops.

To begin, I investigate the rise of early tourism practices and the development of a nascent tourism industry during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In chapter 2, I explore the demise of the antebellum Carnival and the origin of the modern Mardi Gras celebration during the middle of the nineteenth century. Any discussion of tourism and culture in New Orleans must deal with the city’s signature celebration and the part it has historically played in both reflecting and reproducing class and racial conflicts in the city. The early development of tourism in New Orleans is associated with elite efforts to transform Mardi Gras from an indigenous festival into rationalized spectacle. In chapter 3, I examine the mobilization of business elites in the planning and staging of the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans in 1884 and 1885. This exposition was the largest world’s fair of its time and helped nurture the growth of new business networks and cultural organizations to promote the city on global scale.

As I point out in later chapters, New Orleans has long had a penchant for international expositions and the efforts to attract world’s fairs in 1884, 1915, and 1984 reflect the mobilization of local elites to harness tourism flows and build attractions as expedients to economic revitalization and urban place building. International expositions exemplify the articulation of tourism from above and below. On the one hand, expositions represent local efforts to create an ephemeral and large-scale display of local artifacts, foods, and customs to a worldwide audience. On the other hand, expositions comprise a series of extralocal networks, corporations, and organizations working to transform urban space into an entertaining site for the visual consumption of international cultures and identities. As I show, the history of world’s fairs in New Orleans is a history of conflict and antagonism as elite groups and interests have struggled to project a conflict-free image of New Or-

leans while grassroots organizations have attempted to use expositions as political venues to challenge inequalities. Thus, New Orleans's experience with world's fairs reveals the deep fault lines of race and class and provides insight into how opposing constituencies have attempted to articulate and legitimate differing conceptions of an "authentic" New Orleans.

In chapters 4 and 5, I chart the historical development of New Orleans's tourism sector during the early twentieth century up through the 1960s. As I show, the development of the city's modern tourism sector coincides with the institutionalization of racial discrimination in all major facets of social life and culture in the city. The first half of the century is notable for the establishment of the New Orleans Association of Commerce to attract tourism investment and promote the convention trade. In chapter 4, I investigate the competition between New Orleans and San Francisco to attract the 1915 World's Fair, the growth of racial segregation in tourism, and the development of new strategies to promote Mardi Gras as a major tourist attraction. As I point out in chapter 5, the 1960s are a turning point in the historical development of New Orleans tourism. Rise of the civil rights movement combined with spreading urban disinvestment and suburbanization motivated political and economic elites to devise new tourism strategies to revitalize the city. In 1960, local leaders formed the Greater New Orleans Tourist and Convention Commission (GNOTCC), a forerunner to the current New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOMCVB), to rationalize the process of tourism promotion and development. The GNOTCC is a major organization that, beginning in the 1960s, connects the above processes of commodification and rationalization with the below forces of grassroots cultural invention and improvisation to link New Orleans with a fledgling global tourism industry. Broadly, I show that new tourism networks, organizations, and financing helped stimulate a major growth in the number of tourist attractions while simultaneously generating new conflicts and struggles over meanings of local culture and authenticity.

The period after the 1970s inaugurates a new era of local and state government efforts to promote tourism, the formation of specialized tourism organizations, and the development of new tourism networks and marketing strategies (branding). This period also reflects the growth of grassroots cultural organizations and historic preservation groups

such as the Arts Council of New Orleans, the Community Arts Center, the Jazz and Heritage Foundation, Save Our Cemeteries, and the Preservation Resource Center, among many others, dedicated to raising awareness of local culture and heritage. I first examine the planning and staging of the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition in New Orleans, the last world's fair held in the United States. On the one hand, this exposition set in motion the development of new tourism organizations and public-private networks to attract corporate hotel chains and entertainment corporations. On the other hand, the exposition helped spawn a powerful network of grassroots art groups and cultural organizations committed to nourishing and building a tourism from below. I then discuss the rise of urban branding as a major promotional strategy used by powerful tourism organizations to transform urban culture into an abstract sign to entertain visitors and build attractions. Urban branding is a process of transforming otherwise mundane and ordinary symbols, images, and experiences into evocative signs of place distinctiveness to expand the number of visitors and generate local support for tourism investment. In New Orleans, this narrative of distinction or brand strategy is constructed around three themes—history, music, and food—that constitute the “holy trinity” of New Orleans tourism. As I show, since the 1960s, broad sociocultural transformations have blurred the distinction between tourism and other institutions and cultural practices, a development I refer to as a shift from a “culture of tourism” to a “touristic culture.” Today, a touristic culture denotes a process by which tourism discourses and practices increasingly frame meanings and assertions of local culture and authenticity.

In chapters 7 and 8, I use my field observations and interviews to highlight the conflicts and struggles over efforts to commercialize Mardi Gras and transform the French Quarter into an entertainment destination. As tourism has come to dominate more and more aspects of social life in New Orleans, both Mardi Gras and the French Quarter have become contested terrain, where various residents, business and property owners, and elected officials duel over competing meanings of the beloved neighborhood and the city's famous celebration. Disagreements over who speaks for the French Quarter, which groups should control land-use decisions, and how tourist development should proceed in the historic neighborhood define conflicts over tourism. I develop the concept “repertoire of authenticity” to refer to a loose set of themes and symbolic devices that French Quarter residents have cultivated and de-

ployed to battle the growth of corporate entertainment chains, and legitimate their role as controllers of neighborhood redevelopment. In chapter 8, I draw on interviews with local residents and Carnival enthusiasts to explore the role of local actions and organizations in harnessing tourist images and representations to reinforce place distinctiveness and invent new Mardi Gras traditions and customs. As I show, Mardi Gras stands at the intersection of tourism from above and tourism from below. On the one hand, the extralocal forces of commodification, standardization, and rationalization are transforming the celebration. On the other hand, local groups and individuals are using tourism symbols and images to anchor Mardi Gras in place and create new Carnival traditions as a means of reinforcing the uniqueness of New Orleans's Carnival.

By way of conclusion, in chapter 9, I address the current moment, when a broad-based coalition of city leaders and tourism boosters are attempting to revitalize New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina. Hurricane Katrina is an unprecedented disaster that has caused catastrophic human suffering, economic disruption, and physical destruction. In addition, the disaster has exposed to a global audience New Orleans's chronic poverty, strained race relations, and intense inequalities. Since the disaster, local elites have attempted to counter negative images of destruction and advertise New Orleans as a come-back city that is regaining its vibrancy, style, and confidence. At the same time, city leaders and tourism officials have clashed over the role tourism should play in the city rebuilding process. Moreover, the uncertainty and devastation unleashed by Hurricane Katrina has reinvigorated old debates and stimulated new arguments about meanings and definitions of local authenticity. New conflicts and struggles are emerging between local groups and neighborhoods over what constitutes authenticity, who should define what authenticity means, and how authenticity should be expressed. My goal is to explore how the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina is leading to new assertions of "authenticity" and new interpretations of "New Orleans." Finally, I speculate on the future of metropolitan life, race and class relations, and tourism in the post-Katrina years.