Identifying and Delineating the Gulf Coast-Mardi Gras Culture Region

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Abstract

Cultural landscape studies demonstrate that culture and vernacular regions can be defined by various characteristics. This study uses data and methodologies proven by previous culture region studies to examine the Gulf Coast region from Pensacola, Florida to Galveston, Texas. Some regions exhibit a common distribution of material culture and common cultural history. Regions promote a particular tourism theme or present a specific image to draw people and money from outside of the region while other regions present more mundane aspects of life that are not always actively observed. Material culture on the landscape, such as the design of many buildings (barns, houses, or storefronts), are also clues to the history of the local culture of a region and are key to understanding why and how culture and vernacular regions exist. Business directory listings, personal observations and GIS tools result in the delineation of the boundaries of a core and periphery region with New Orleans as a center from which a sphere of influence emanates.

Keywords: culture region, Gulf Coast, Mardi Gras, material culture, New Orleans.

This paper examines the Gulf Coast region of the United States from Galveston, Texas, to Pensacola, Florida, with a focus on the material culture associated with New Orleans in Louisiana. From the food, to business names, to downtown French Quarter-style architecture, this research looks at the material culture associated with New Orleans that is present in the six major coastal population centers of the region. The cities included are Galveston, New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi, Mobile, Alabama, and Pensacola.

Previous research uses a range of methods, data, and methodologies to study culture regions and their boundaries. Methods include collecting information on material culture (Kniffen 1965; Miller 1968; Shortridge 2003), observing regional trends (Meinig 1969; Zelinsky 1980; 1992; Garreau 1981), archival work (Reed 1976; Reed, Kohls, and Hanchette 1990; McEwen 2007; Ambinakudige 2009), and survey research (Jordan 1978; Lamme and

Oldakowski 1982; 2007; Shortridge 2003). The data utilized include information on food, oral histories, architecture, individual people's perceptions, economic and historical trends, or even information as mundane as names of businesses. The data analyzed by geographers leads them to generally place the boundaries of culture regions and the extents of spheres of influence where they deem appropriate. Others have used counties or clustered data points as units of analysis to locate the core of a region. In recent studies, computer aided spatial analysis and cartography has moved the study of culture regions toward more objective views of some portions of the cultural and vernacular landscape of North America (McEwen 2007; Ambinakudige 2009). This paper does not claim to identify a previously unknown or unrecognized region of the cultural landscape of North America. However, by means of an innovative combination of proven methods, types of data, and methodologies, the contribution of this research lies in the delineation of the extent of the culture region in question and a sphere of influence that is centered on New Orleans.

The first section of this paper discusses the study of culture and vernacular regions in the United States. The focus is on the different types of data collected, how they have been analyzed, and some specific culture regions. This is followed with an outline of the material culture that are used to study the New Orleans identity region on the Gulf Coast. Pictures and observations collected in the field are analyzed along with the distribution of businesses whose names indicate identification with the New Orleans identity. The conclusion is that there is a definable region with a core and a periphery whose center is New Orleans and that geographers should continue to explore the notion of regions such as the one discussed here.

Studying culture and vernacular regions

Human geographers recognize culture regions as important features of the landscape. These regions occasionally give rise to vernacular regions which are, "the product of the spatial perception of average people" (Jordan 1978, 394). In the United States there are many culture and vernacular regions. Some of these regions cover a large physical area and can include up to a dozen states. The South and the Midwest are examples of such regions (Reed 1976; Garreau 1981; Shortridge 1985; Reed, Kohls, and Hanchette 1990; Zelinksy 1992). Wilbur Zelinsky (1992) classifies these large regions as First Tier regions as they tend to be both geographically large (covering multiple states) and are generally well known in the collective mind of the population of the U.S. While First Tier regions tend to be better known and defined in terms of what characteristics make them distinct, their actual extents are not always easily delineated and are not static over time.

Within First Tier regions, there are relatively smaller Secondary and Tertiary regions that are less well known and that have more specific and distinct characteristics. For example Ary Lamme and Ray Oldakowski (2007) identify several distinct culture regions in Florida that partially explain differences in

Author	Year	Bus. Names	Surveys of Perception	Material Culture	Regional Economy, Social Attitudes, Personal Accounts	Culture (History, Religion, Politics, or Food)
Kniffen	1965			X		
Miller	1968			X	X	
Meinig	1969				X	X
Reed	1976	X				
Jordan	1978		X			
Zelinsky	1980	X				
Garreau	1981				X	X
Lamme & Oldakowski	1982	X	X			
Shortridge, J.	1985		X			
Lloyd & Steinke	1986		X			
Shortridge, J.	1987		X			
Reed, Kohls, & Hanchette	1990	X				
Zelinsky	1992				X	X
Shortridge, B.	2003		X			X
McEwen	2007	X				
Lamme & Oldakowski	2007	X	X		X	
Ambinakudi-ge	2009	X				
This Study	----	X		X		X

Table 1: A chronology of culture and vernacular region studies, 1965–present

social attitude and political behavior between the population in Pensacola, in the state's panhandle, and the population of Miami in the southeastern region of the state.

Lamme and Oldakowski (2007) also identified vernacular regions that are not necessarily based on influences from the cultural landscape of the state. These regions lay along the coast of the state and are known best for the various types of economic activities that dominate the areas or for particular tour-

ism themes. Examples are the Space Coast (known for Kennedy Space Center) and the Nature Coast (known as a destination for nature seekers). The point that Lamme and Oldakowski make is that regions are part of a web with many strands that connect them not only to regions at their scale, but also to smaller and larger regions within a continuous scale. This is true whether they are known for the specific behavior and common culture of the population or simply as a way to attract tourism business.

Culture regions are also identified not just based on a conglomeration of characteristics such as religion, music tastes, clothing tastes or food tastes, but any one of these can stand alone to define a particular culture or vernacular region. Major food regions of the Great Plains have been identified based on how groups of the population tend to cook beef and vegetables and which types of beans and desserts they like to eat (Shortridge 2003). Fred Kniffen (1965) demonstrated that regions are also definable by vernacular architecture whose diffusion was facilitated by people with unique historical and cultural identities. The point that Kniffen (1965) makes is that the specific types of architecture prominent in a certain region are clues to the cultural history of the people who settled in those areas.

The distribution of the various characteristics of regions should also be mapped, as each of the studies mentioned above has done. More than several different methodologies have been used to determine and understand the spatial distribution of the characteristics of regions. The methodologies used by other social scientists tend to be mixed and utilize a compilation of different data sources and types which are outlined in Table 1. Although the physical manifestations of local religious or political persuasions may be counted as material culture (political campaign signs or three Christian crosses on a roadside), these are listed as their own category and material culture includes artifacts of culture such as a particular architectural style or food.

There is a division with regard to how quantitative versus qualitative culture region studies have been conducted over the past five decades (Table 1). With the exception of Lamme and Oldakowski (2007) and this study, no previous study has utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches to delineate culture or perceptual region boundaries. To put a finer point on it, although such studies as Reed (1976), Reed, Kohls, and Hanchette (1990), and Shrinidhi Ambinakudige (2009) studied a region that is easily identifiable based on its collective history, social attitudes, and culture, the data analyzed (telephone business directory listings) are still quantitative. The same is also true with a survey approach. Although surveys ask questions related to individual people's perceptions, the results were still generalized to establish region boundaries. Less than half of the studies in Table 1 have a qualitative approach, focusing primarily on socio-cultural attitudes or material manifestations of regional and local traditions and history. Only two of the studies (Shortridge 2003; Lamme and Oldakowski 2007) use mixed approaches by combining a survey research method with information based on widely held perceptions associated with a particular geographic area.

Joel Garreau (1981) and Zelinsky (1980; 1992) determined the locations of the boundaries of large regions encompassing multiple states and crossing international borders. The boundaries are based primarily on general qualitative observations and accounts of the regions they each describe. Using business addresses has been utilized successfully to map out large culture regions like the South (Reed 1976; Reed, Kohls, and Hanchette 1990) and even small vernacular areas of a Southern city (McEwen 2007). A third method is to mine data from the public in the form of surveys (Jordan 1978; Lloyd and Steinke 1986; Shortridge 1987; Lamme and Oldakowski 2007). The latter two methods are more quantitative because of their use of individual data points paired with the geographic location of those data points thus determining the boundaries of culture regions.

Using business names from a telephone or internet directory is a proven method for determining region boundaries. John Shelton Reed (1976) and Zelinsky (1980) successfully mapped the boundaries of the South and Dixie using this method. To determine what parts of the U.S. are part of the South and Dixie (the two are not exclusive of one another), Reed used the ratio of the number of businesses with the words "South" or "Southern" in their name to the number of businesses with the words "America" or "American" in their names. The same process was used to determining the boundary of Dixie (Reed 1976).

Nearly fifteen years later, Reed returned to the 1976 study to analyze if and how the boundaries of the South and Dixie shifted over the years (Reed, Kohls, and Hanchette 1990). Their research concluded that the boundaries of the South and Dixie indeed shrank over the years and that, although some areas where businesses had more strongly identified with the South or Dixie became diluted, other areas' presumable identification with those regions had become stronger or more concentrated.

This method has also been used to map smaller vernacular regions in Jacksonville, Florida (McEwen 2007). The regions are more or less major neighborhoods of the city and are referred to as micro-vernacular regions (Zelinsky 1992). The study of these small regions introduced the use of GIS (Geographic Information Systems) as a more objective method of analyzing regions based on business names. Similar to the studies of the South and Dixie (Reed 1976; Reed, Kohls, and Hanchette 1990), the study utilized business names but used the names of the micro-regions instead. Spatial analysis tools available in GIS were employed to determine where one region stopped and merged with another region, thus allowing the data points for the study to determine the region boundaries on their own.

Likewise, Ambinakudige (2009) utilized other spatial analysis tools in GIS to update the boundaries of the South (Reed 1976; Reed, Kohls, and Hanchette 1990) as a culture region by applying the method of using business names with words such as "South" or "Southern" as a ratio to businesses that use the words "America" or American". With the benefit of looking back—even with a time-series of studies of the boundaries of the South as a culture region—a negative

aspect of the method of using business directory listings is that it does not explain what drives the existence of a culture or micro-vernacular region. Rather, using business names serves more as a beginning place to understand the geographic boundaries of a region and not why they exist. In this study, aspects of New Orleans' identity and culture are used to understand what drives the boundaries of the culture region in question.

By combining analysis of the material culture that has grown out of and is a part of the historical culture of New Orleans along with business directory listings, this study will show how New Orleans serves as an identity hearth for the Gulf Coast region and where its material culture has diffused across the region. This study advances the literature reviewed here by combining unique methods, data, and methodologies, thus yielding results which assist in identifying the boundaries of a previously not delineated region of the cultural landscape of North America with a sphere of influence whose center is New Orleans.

The culture region studies discussed here demonstrate that regions can be described and are inscribed on the cultural landscape in many ways. Some regions exhibit a particular spatial distribution of food preparation and consumption habits (Shortridge 2003). Regions that hope to attract a particular crowd or present a specific image to those outside of the region promote activities that occur in the area (Lamme and Oldakowski 2007). Still other regions may present aspects of life that are not always actively observed by people. Material culture on the landscape, such as the design of buildings (barns, houses, or storefronts) can also be clues to the history of the local culture of a region (Lewis 1982).

The methodologies described in previous studies of culture regions will be used to study the region from Pensacola to Galveston. First, concentrations of evidence of identification with New Orleans' culture will be determined using personal observations in the field and business directory listings, using GIS as a tool for analysis. By understanding the distribution of the material culture associated with the history and culture of New Orleans, it is possible to determine what locations in the region identify with New Orleans' history and culture. The expectation is that the data will present New Orleans as having a sphere of influence within a formal region based on the flows of historical traditions such as Mardi Gras, and shared uses of various aspects of the material culture that has developed out of the socio-cultural history of the area.

This study observes six large cities that exhibit some identification with New Orleans' history and culture along the Gulf Coast (Figure 1). Observations include Mardi Gras warehouse stores in Biloxi, Mississippi, an Italian/Panini-style muffuletta sandwich in Mobile, Alabama, and French Quarter-style downtown buildings in Pensacola, Galveston, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans. Each city has ties to French and Spanish explorers that colonized the area and who impacted the development of culture in these cities and whose influence can still be seen today.
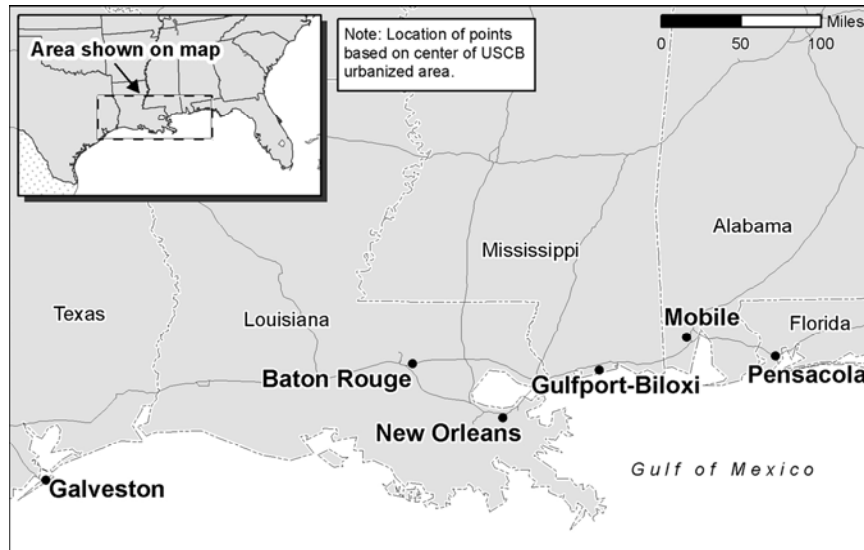
Figure 1: Six cities of the Gulf Coast study area. (Cartography by the author).

Setting up the study area

For the purpose of this study, various elements of the material culture of New Orleans will be used to determine identification with New Orleans' history and culture. Although the primary focus is on the downtown and central business districts of the six cities in the study area, some elements of the material culture will not be restricted to CBD's yet will still be considered as evidence of identification with New Orleans culture. A description of the Gulf Coast region as it is understood by geographers is included as well.

Defining the New Orleans identity

There are many aspects of New Orleans that may be common to other cities of comparable size. New Orleans has a professional football team, the Saints, and a professional basketball team, the Hornets. Although this is not true for all of the cities included in this study, support for these teams is not included as it is not a unique aspect of the city as many other cities in the U.S. also have professional sports teams. The presence of a river is also not unique. Although the Mississippi River is integral to the history of the city and developing its culture, the river does not run through all of the other study cities and, as with sports teams, the presence of a river is common in many large cities. Additionally, shotgun houses, which originated in New Orleans with the arrival of former Haitian slaves (Lewis 2003) are not restricted to New Orleans, and can be found as far away as California, Chicago, and Tampa, Florida (Gist 2010).

Thusly, the selection of characteristics observed throughout the region are not selected purely for convenience, rather they have been selected for the fact that they are distinctive to and indicative of New Orleans' cultural identity. For this study, unique elements of material culture that will be recognized as related to the New Orleans identity are the food, above-ground cemeteries, parade krewes, colonial squares, and businesses that use terms related to New Orleans identity. On an additional note, a portion of the research covers non-academic resources which Peirce Lewis notes as, "awash with fascinating and useful material," about common items (1982, 179).

French Quarter balconies
New Orleans' French Quarter is a historic district located behind a levee on the Mississippi River in downtown New Orleans. The "Quarter" as New Orleanians refer to it, serves as the city's, "chief symbolic totem," (Lewis 2003, 86) and influences many tourists decision to visit New Orleans. Though one might presume the design of the buildings in the Quarter to be French, the architecture is actually of a style imported by the Spanish who controlled New Orleans during the end of the eighteenth century, rebuilding it following several fires that destroyed the old French structures (Lewis 2003). Wrought iron balconies attached to many building fronts are a distinct feature of the Quarter. The balconies appeared in the mid-1800s when a prominent resident included the wrought iron fixtures on her house located near the central square of the French Quarter (NOO 2010). In the present day, Mardi Gras party-goers watch the festivities from these balconies during Mardi Gras (or nearly any other time of the year), throwing beads to people on the street below (among other activities).

The muffuletta
The Central Grocery (Figure 2) in the French Quarter is recognized by some as the originator of the muffuletta sandwich (Sheraton 1986; MSI 2007). The muffuletta is served on a round bun of soft bread with Italian ham, salami, mortadella, provolone cheese, and an oily mixture of olives and peppers (Sheraton 1986). The story of its creation says that Italian workers would buy different food items for lunch at the grocery store each day. Seeing this, the owner of the store caught on and decided to make a sandwich out of the ingredients. Different versions of the muffuletta now exist. The original, New Orleans' style, is served on a large round bun while another style is served on flattened, Panini-style bread.

Above-ground cemeteries
Although New Orleans is known for its above-ground cemeteries, the practice of laying the dead to rest in this style has roots in Spanish and French tradition (Green 2008). Popular belief also holds that the above-ground vaults originated in the city for environmental and health reasons (Green 2008). The

Figure 2: Sign above the entrance to the Central Grocery Co. on Decatur Street in the French Quarter (author 2010).

primary concern was that graves would fill with water when dug or heavy rains would cause floods and airtight caskets would come out of the ground (Greene 2008; ENO 2009). In the late 18th Century, when the first above-ground cemeteries were established by residents in New Orleans, the leadership of the local government was loyal to Spain and used the vault burial system that was popular there at the time (Keister 2009). Although they are not unique to New Orleans, with over forty above-ground cemeteries, the city is well known for them (Greene 2008; ENO 2009).

Colonial squares

Public squares are another common artifact of Spanish colonialism. The typical layout of one of these squares is to have a main church or place of worship on one side, government administrative edifices on another side and military headquarters of some kind on a third side, with businesses finishing off the fourth. Although this example is not necessarily prevalent in the present day, any downtown square that is representative of the example of the colonial square is a clue to the same Spanish colonial influences that still exist in New Orleans.

Business names

Just as previous studies such as those by Reed (1976), Zelinsky (1980), Reed , Kohls, and Hanchette (1990), McEwen (2007), and Ambinakudige (2009) used terms related to the vernacular regions that they studied, this study replicates the application of this method. The terms, "Mardi Gras," "Fat Tuesday," "French Quarter," and "Shrove Tuesday" are searched for in the names of the businesses in the United States. Shrove Tuesday is the English (British)

language version of Mardi Gras and is included as well. Because Mardi Gras krewes are important to organizing and throwing parades, businesses that use the term will also be included.

Origins of Mardi Gras

Mardi Gras has been "celebrated" in the New World since 1699 when a settler, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville camped near the mouth of the Mississippi River. Upon realizing that it was about that time in France, he named his camp, "Point du Mardi Gras," (Robbins 1979). Since the founding of New Orleans, unorganized and unofficial celebrations have been held by European groups living in the area. Over the decades and centuries of rule by various colonial powers—French, Spanish, and English—Mardi Gras faced various challenges. For people that celebrated the holiday, these challenges include banned masquerade balls and street celebrations and having their Catholic faith oppressed. In New Orleans, Mardi Gras was mostly unorganized until the mid-18th Century when the Mistick Krewe of Comus conducted a parade to honor Comus, the god of mirth (Patterson 1960). The tradition of organized Mardi Gras celebrations were put on hiatus when the Civil War broke out.

Since the time of the Civil War, Mardi Gras developed in New Orleans and in the Gulf Coast region to what it is today. Various krewes organize parades throughout the city with floats and people throwing trinkets (like plastic Mardi Gras beads) to people out celebrating the holiday. In New Orleans' French Quarter, people stand on balconies to watch the floats and the people on the streets. Other cities on the Gulf Coast also celebrate Mardi Gras. Galveston has a long-standing tradition of celebrating the holiday, and Pensacola, Mobile, Gulfport-Biloxi, and Baton Rouge celebrate Mardi Gras as well. Each city has its own set of krewes and each claims some connection to the holiday.

Mardi Gras krewes began in the late 1800s as exclusive whites-only clubs and remained so well into the twentieth century. Blacks and women formed equally exclusive clubs later. Desegregation of cities and krewes eventually occurred by choice or by law and men, women, and multiple ethnicities now comprise krewe membership. Krewes and their parades and parties became more organized following the turn of the twentieth century and some krewes now represent special interest groups, pay homage to historical or mythological beliefs, or are just for fun (Hardy 2010).

The Gulf Coast functional region

When Garreau (1981) wrote about the Gulf Coast, in *The Nine Nations of North America*, he described it as running from Pensacola to Galveston. Pensacola anchored the east side of the region with its naval air station. As a port city, Mobile hoped to grow when it would be connected to the Appalachian coal region by a series of rivers. The military shipbuilding industry made the Mississippi coast strong. New Orleans and Baton Rouge were a small megalopolis with New Orleans ripe to become a hot tourist destination. Galveston

marked the western extent of the Gulf Coast as the town that helped to make Houston the third-largest port in tonnage in North America (Garreau 1981) while at the same time remaining culturally and historically connected to New Orleans (Meinig 1969).

Outlining popular regions of North America, the Gulf (as in Gulf Coast) is identified as a region that spans the coast from around the Tampa, Florida, region, occurring intermittently to Mississippi and continuing as a solid region to Corpus Christi, Texas (Meinig 1969; Jordan 1978; Zelinsky 1980; 1992). Additionally, the Gulf is perforated by Acadia in central southern Louisiana (Zelinsky 1980). In *The Cultural Geography of the United* States, Zelinsky did not outline a Gulf Coast region in a map of primary, secondary, or tertiary regions of the U.S. He instead outlined French Louisiana whose boundary starts along the Gulf of Mexico at the Alabama–Florida border and proceeds west to the Louisiana—Texas border and does not include Galveston (Zelinsky 1992).

There is enough evidence in both the academic literature and popular culture knowledge to limit the size of the study area. The cities that are included in this study are based in the Gulf region (Zelinsky 1980) and in French Louisiana (Zelinsky 1992), and include Galveston as part of the region based on observations by Donald Meinig (1969), Terry Jordan (1978), and Garreau (1981) as well as the fact that it celebrates Mardi Gras and has historical connections with the French Louisiana region (Meinig 1969).

New Orleans material culture in the Gulf Coast region

Elements of the material culture of New Orleans and Mardi Gras are found in each of the six cities in this study. Each city also has its own level of association with the region based on the data collected. The following results are compiled from evidence collected in the field, on the internet, and using an academic business directory database.

French Quarter-style balconies and business fronts are found in each city except Gulfport-Biloxi. Although each of the cities in the study faced the physical effects of Hurricane Katrina, Gulfport and Biloxi faced the storm surge head-on without the benefits of protection from levees or being situated on a more inland body of water. As a result, portions of the downtown areas of both cities had to be almost entirely rebuilt. Katrina wiped away much of the historic architecture that existed in these cities before the hurricane. The downtown areas look more like the example in Figure 3a with newly-paved streets, new building fronts, and palm tree-lined sidewalks.

There is no place like New Orleans' French Quarter (Figure 3b) in any of the cities in the study area. Although the city also faced the physical effects of Hurricane Katrina, the French Quarter appears to have returned to its pre-Katrina business-as-usual. With a core along Decatur and Bourbon Streets and trolley cars running along the Mississippi River, the French Quarter is a unique neighborhood that contains a mixture of residential property and businesses, restaurants, and bars in a highly integrated setting. Wrought iron balconies

Figure 3a: Downtown Gulfport (author 2010).

Figure 3b: Decatur Street in the French Quarter, New Orleans (author 2010).

Figure 3c: The Strand District, Galveston (author 2010).

Figure 3d: Historic District, Mobile (author 2010).

Figure 3e: Seville Historic District, Pensacola (author 2010).

Figure 3f: Lafayette building in downtown Baton Rouge (author 2010).

Figure 4a: Muffuletta at Franky and Johnny's, New Orleans (author 2010).

adorn nearly every building front and are prime property for viewing the festivities from above the street during Mardi Gras.

Galveston, Mobile, Pensacola, and Baton Rouge (figures 3c, d, e, and f, respectively) all offer the feel of standing on Decatur or Bourbon Streets in at least one spot in their downtowns as well. Mobile's French Quarter-esque historic downtown is similar to the French Quarter' as the streets are relatively narrow and the buildings share the same style as those in the French Quarter. Although the buildings in Baton Rouge's downtown have the balconies, the feel of being in the French Quarter is just not the same as it is in Mobile. Likewise, Galveston seems to be pushing the feel of the Quarter just a bit with a somewhat contrived appearance, and Pensacola's effort seems to be a mixture of wrought iron balconies affixed to Florida-style stucco business façades. Whatever the feelings that are generated by each city's downtown area, French Quarter balconies are not the only evidence of identification with New Orleans' culture in the region.

Several eateries serve muffuletta sandwiches in the study area. In Galveston, the Maceo Spice & Import Company claims to sell the original recipe for the muffuletta. According to the company's website, Rosario Maceo learned to make the muffuletta at the French Quarter's Central Grocery and took the recipe to Galveston where he set up shop (MSI 2007). The original muffuletta recipe that started at the Central Grocery Company is now copied across the region (Figure 4a).

At the food courts of casinos in Biloxi, however, pre-made muffulettas on a typical round Italian bread loaf are kept waiting in coolers during the day. This is most likely the case throughout the Gulf Coast as self-serve food establishments and food courts may be prone to attempting to provide a semblance of regional flavor while at the same time striving to maintain low prices. In Baton Rouge as well, some grocery stores also keep pre-made muffuletta on hand. Unfortunately, these muffulettas sit in coolers throughout the day while the olive oil and juices soak into the bottom half of the bread, turning the crispy loaf soggy.

It was not determined whether or not there were any stores in Pensacola that sold muffuletta sandwiches. For instance, when I asked a worker in a sandwich shop called Big Easy Tavern and Cajun Café (near the historic downtown area in Pensacola) if the restaurant served muffuletta sandwiches, his response was a sheepish, "No." There are some restaurants that serve up the sandwich in Baton Rouge. Rocco's New Orleans Style Po-Boys & Café (Rocco's 2010) offers the New Orleans style muffuletta that is also served at restaurants in New Orleans, however, there appears to be less of an effort put into making the muffuletta at Rocco's based on the amount and flavor of the ingredients of the sandwich.

In Mobile, Joe Cain Café serves its own version of the muffeletta (Figure 4b). A comparison of the two different versions shows the obvious difference. The muffuletta served in Mobile is served on a Panini-style bread loaf as opposed to a large Italian-style loaf, but the main ingredients are still the same. This divergent muffuletta may mean a couple of things. First, it is evident that some people in Mobile identify with New Orleans food and are paying homage to a particular element of the cuisine of the French Quarter. Second, it is possible that although Joe Cain Café pays homage to the original muffuletta, Mobile is attempting to establish its own identity to distinguish it from New Orleans. These observations and encounters from Galveston to Pensacola demonstrate that there is no standard for preparation of the muffeletta sandwich to which any one establishment necessarily adheres.

As previous studies have done, this study uses business telephone directories to find the addresses of businesses that aide in identifying the extent for the Gulf Coast Mardi Gras region. The search combines results using two databases, ReferenceUSA and LexisNexis Academic - Business database. A search for businesses in the United States that use the terms, "Mardi Gras," "Fat Tuesday," "French Quarter," or "krewe," in their name yielded 511 businesses whose state in which they are located could be determined. A search for businesses using the term, "Shrove Tuesday," yielded no results. The search resulted in the following: businesses that use Fat Tuesday—30, Mardi Gras—183, krewe—108, and French Quarter—190. Not surprisingly, states other than those in the study area have businesses that use these terms, including two businesses in Washington, D.C. Only nine states do not have businesses that use any of those terms. Figure 5 shows the number of businesses per million
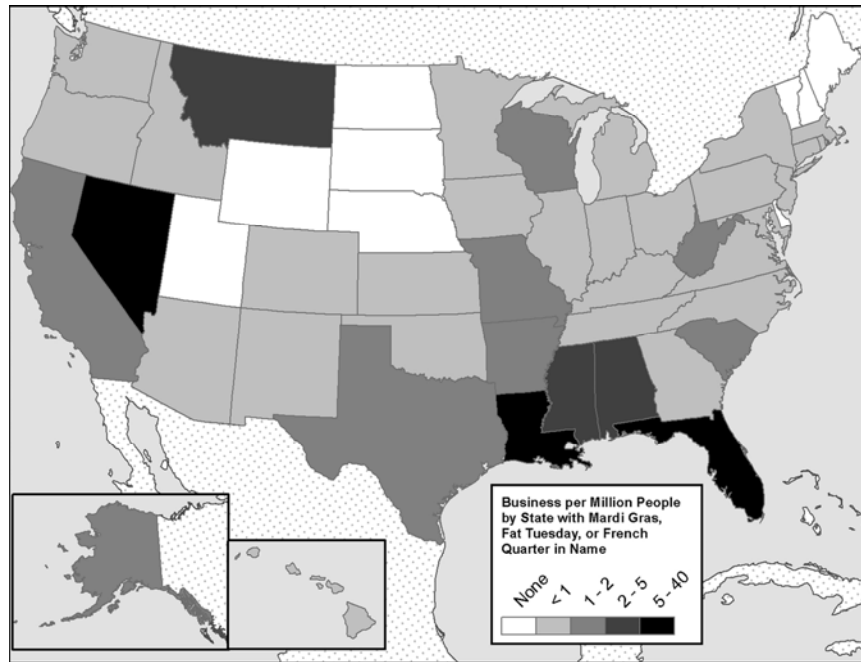
Figure 5: New Orleans identity businesses per million people by state (cartography by the author).

people by state (using 2010 U.S. Census data) that use one of the three terms. Nevada and Montana are outliers on the map. Montana only has two businesses but a population less than one million people thus inflating its relative affiliation with New Orleans' identity. In Nevada, the businesses are concentrated in Las Vegas with ten businesses and Reno with three and are most likely a way to attract money to gaming places.

Of the 511 businesses, 320 (almost two-thirds) are located in one of the five states in the study area. There are 12 in Mississippi, 14 in Alabama, 40 in Texas, 70 in Florida, and 184 in Louisiana. Using ArcMap, the address of 284 of the businesses was successfully geolocated. Instead of relying solely on the city in the address of each business, all of the relevant businesses in each of the five states were geolocated to account for businesses on the outskirts of or near any of the study area cities. Figure 6 shows the result of geolocating the businesses and Table 2 shows the number of businesses in each city that use one of the three terms.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of businesses in the region that align with New Orleans' identity. The breakdown of the number of businesses in each city is: New Orleans—77, Baton Rouge—15, Pensacola—3, Mobile—6, Galveston—4, Gulfport/Biloxi—2. The actual numbers are somewhat misleading. Based on personal observations, there are several businesses in all of the cities,

City	Parade Krewes	FQ Style in CBD	Colonial Square	Above Ground Cemetery	Businesses with Identity Terms	Muffuletta
Galveston	15	Yes	No	Yes	4	Yes
Baton Rouge	8	Yes	No	Yes	15	Yes
New Orleans	54	Yes	Yes	Yes	77	Yes
Gulfport-Biloxi	18	No	No	Yes	2	Yes
Mobile	3	Yes	Yes	Yes	6	Yes
Pensacola	24	Yes	Indeterminate	Yes	3	No

Table 2: Elements of New Orleans history, identity, and culture by city

other than New Orleans, that use the terms French Quarter, Fat Tuesday, Mardi Gras. For reasons that are not apparent, those businesses did not occur in the ReferenceUSA and LexisNexis databases used to compile the locations shown in figure six. Despite this, there is no reason to assume that this introduces any bias to this component of the study. A core is present in New Orleans and the locations of the businesses shown on the map serve as evidence that a functional region exists along Interstate 10 from Galveston to Pensacola. The region is functional in that businesses recognize a utility in associating with the New Orleans identity. Additionally, note the white circle in the New Orleans cluster of businesses which represents the most centrally located business among the five states *and* within the core and periphery of the region based on analyzing the distribution with the central feature tool in ArcMap.

In order to establish a core and periphery for the region, another tool in ArcMap is used to create a buffer of 120 miles around each of the six cities. Although arbitrary, the 120 mile radius casts a reasonably wide enough net to establish a periphery of the Gulf Coast-Mardi Gras region that includes Houston, Texas and some small areas that lie outside of the core. Although a distinct line is drawn as the boundary of the periphery, some people may wish to argue that it should extend up to Shreveport, Louisiana, Jackson, Mississippi, or even to the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Happily, that is the point of understanding culture regions: their boundaries are generally based on perception, so no single opinion about where the boundary should be placed is necessarily wrong.

The core of the region shown in figure six is based on a 50 mile radius around the study cities. It captures businesses just east of Pensacola, toward the Gulf of Mexico southwest of New Orleans, and leaves Houston in the periphery as Meinig (1969), Jordan (1978), and Zelinksy (1980; 1992) might have
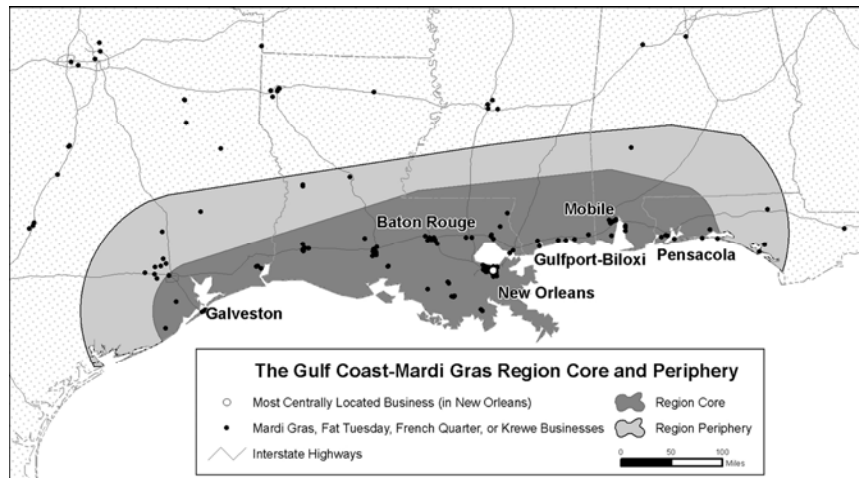
Figure 6: Core and periphery regions of the Gulf Coast-Mardi Gras region (cartography by the author) .

done. Although the distribution of businesses demonstrates core and periphery areas of the region, New Orleans' sphere of influence clearly expands past the periphery with businesses in Jackson, Shreveport, Dallas–Fort Worth, and Atlanta (not shown on the map) where businesses make use of New Orleans- and Mardi Gras-related terms.

Table two provides a summary of which of each of the material elements of New Orleans' culture and identity are observed in each of the study areas. For each of the cities, it is clear that there are ties to culture that originated in New Orleans. Naturally, New Orleans has the highest number or krewes, and businesses that use terms which relate to the history and culture of New Orleans.

Based on the data collected, Pensacola exhibits the lowest level of identification with the New Orleans culture hearth; however, this is partly due to a lack of evidence regarding the inability to find a muffuletta sandwich or to find a colonial square or remnant of one in the city. Gulfport-Biloxi is second least due to the missing French Quarter balconies in the downtown areas and the fewest number of businesses using terms such as, "French Quarter," or, "Mardi Gras."

Galveston, Baton Rouge, and Mobile each exhibit closer ties to New Orleans culture. Galveston has a higher number of parade krewes but only a few businesses with identity terms and Mobile has only a few krewes and businesses, but has developed its own version of the muffuletta, has a colonial square, and French Quarter-style balconies. The city geographically closest to New Orleans, Baton Rouge, appears to be a bit above par compared to Galveston in terms of the number of businesses and krewes. The city also does have some above-ground burial plots in the Baton Rouge National Cemetery to the east of

downtown and French Quarter-style balconies in the CBD. Although, Baton Rouge does not have a downtown colonial square like Jackson Square in the French Quarter, there are plans in the works to develop a downtown square as a cultural center to the city (DDD 2010).

A Gulf Coast-Mardi Gras culture region and New Orleans sphere of influence

The activities and material culture common to New Orleans that have been used to define the extent of the New Orleans identity region have their origins in hundreds of years of culture and colonialism. The first conclusion of this paper is that New Orleans is the hearth of material culture such as the wrought iron balconies of the French Quarter, muffuletta sandwiches and, of course, Mardi Gras and associate krewes. As such, the region surrounding it from Galveston to Pensacola is both a functional and formal region whose identity emanates from the central node of New Orleans. Similar to coastal regions in Florida such as the, "Space Coast," or "Nature Coast," (Lamme and Oldakowski 2007), the Gulf Coast-Mardi Gras region is so named here for the activities that take place there and the material culture that are representative of it. Unlike those regions in Florida, the activities that take place in the region are steeped in tradition that is deeper than a simple need to promote the region for capitalist reasons such as business competition and tourism.

Based on the distribution and concentration of businesses with names that use terms connecting them to New Orleans identity, Interstate 10, which runs through the region, is an artery that carries New Orleans' identity throughout the region also creating a sphere of influence that springs from the city. Because a concentration of businesses is found there, there must be some economic benefit to including some aspect of New Orleans identity in business names. It is not surprising that Louisiana, especially the southern part of the state, has the highest concentration of those businesses since it is nearest to the center of the New Orleans sphere of influence.

The second conclusion is that by combining an examination of the material culture that has grown out of and is part of the traditional culture of New Orleans with business directory listings, this study shows that there is a reason that businesses use terms that connect them to the New Orleans identity. The material culture that has developed and diffused from New Orleans to the rest of the Gulf Coast exists in and around the study cities. These material culture elements drive the existence of New Orleans identity in the creation of a functional region as evidenced by businesses that use terms that connect them to the identity hearth that is New Orleans.

With the exception of Gulfport-Biloxi, French Quarter-like historic downtown districts can be seen in Pensacola, Mobile, Baton Rouge, and Galveston. Except for the similar wrought iron balconies and store fronts, none of these are remotely comparable to the French Quarter in New Orleans. Even on a Saturday, five months away from Fat Tuesday, people on Bourbon Street seem

on the verge of erupting into festivities. This is nowhere to be found in any of the other study cities. One possible reason for this absence of French Quarter architecture is due to factors of the physical environment of the Gulf Coast. The storm surge from Hurricane Katrina inundated the cities of Gulfport and Biloxi, both of whose downtown areas are located about one-quarter of a mile from the Gulf of Mexico, thus allowing the storm to wash away historic buildings, local architecture, and building façades. Why the people of Biloxi and Gulfport did not choose to recreate the former appearance of the respective downtowns was not elucidated over the course of this research.

An final observation that should be made is that there appears to be an absence of sports team allegiances associated with the Gulf Coast-Mardi Gras region. The region includes two National Football League (New Orleans Saints and Houston Texans), one Major League Baseball (Houston Astros), and two National Basketball Association (Houston Rockets and New Orleans Hornets) sports teams. If there is some pattern of allegiance to sports teams in the region, the split would most likely occur along the Texas–Louisiana state border and along the Mississippi–Alabama state line where Mobileans and Pensacolans might be more prone to rooting for sports teams based in Atlanta or other Florida cities. Likewise, any allegiances to college teams would cause further disruption due to the fact that five Southeastern Conference schools with popular football teams are dominant in the region. Louisiana State University, Mississippi State University, University of Mississippi, University of Alabama, and Auburn University each enjoy strongholds of support throughout the Gulf Coast despite the fact that all but LSU are not actually located in or very near the Interstate 10 corridor that connects the region. These regionalized sports team affiliations have also been identified as potential sources of another kind of regional identity that may have spatial boundaries (Zelinsky 1992).

As a final thought, though Mardi Gras can be celebrated anywhere à la Cinco de Mayo, the region of New Orleans identity practice is concentrated in the five Gulf Coast states and centered on New Orleans. There are other regions in the United States with similarly long-standing traditions, steeped in culture and history that are waiting to be studied by geographers. Saint Patrick's Day celebrations take place around the country with large celebrations in cities from Boston to Chicago to Dublin, Georgia. Oktoberfest is another celebration that has been carried over to the U.S. and has European origins. Oktoberfest celebrations occur annually around the country, from Texas to Wisconsin and other locations where German immigrants settled throughout the U.S. Although the material elements of the cultures from which those celebrations have emerged are not identical to those of New Orleans, a comprehensive study of where the identities associated with these celebrations are concentrated around the country may well reveal the existence of other regions like the Gulf Coast-Mardi Gras culture region.

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