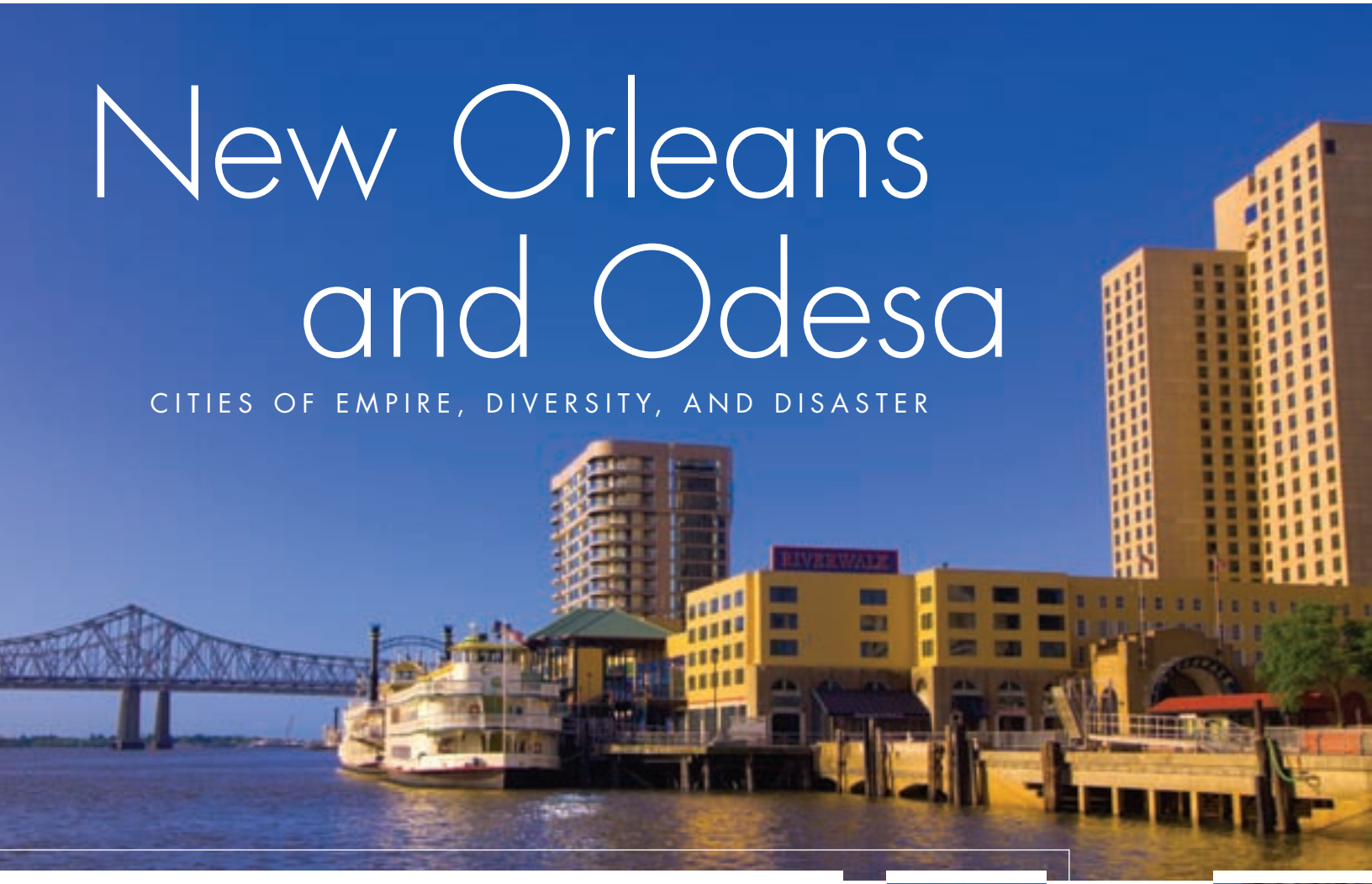
New Orleans and Odesa

CITIES OF EMPIRE, DIVERSITY, AND DISASTER



NEW ORLEANS and **ODESA** encompass two distinct urban cultures with similarly intertwined historical legacies. Like many cities, these areas faced challenges of empire, diversity, and disaster. It is, however, their commitment to overcoming these obstacles that define the uniqueness of New Orleans and Odesa. Established as imperial cities, their waterfront locations transformed provincial towns into thriving commercial metropolises. In time, the cities' natural urban growth attracted multitudes of people from countless countries. The convergence of new populations allowed these cities to embrace their own unique urban environment, thereby defining their own space and culture. At times of deep struggle, political corruption and lawlessness dominated these cities.

New Orleans and Odesa are children of the 18th century and long-collapsed empires. Configured to be modern cities in newly acquired territories, engineers conceptualized these places to be "European" in design and spirit using new urban planning techniques while incorporating classical features. Located on southern coastal boundaries, these cities matured into vibrant cosmopolitan seaports.

The lure of their frontier quality and economic prosperity attracted new diversity to the region. From their inception, the first-wave immigrants naturally represented many European nationalities, which mingled with local inhabitants. One unique feature of New Orleans and Odesa was the treatment of forced servitude classes. Although New Orleans was in the midst of the thriving American slave trade, the city offered protection to both freed and runaway slaves while maintaining guidelines for the protection of owned slaves. Likewise, Odesa allowed sanctuary for fleeing serfs.

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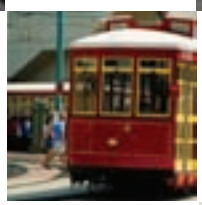
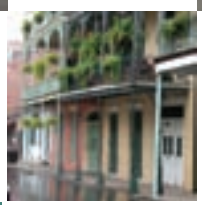
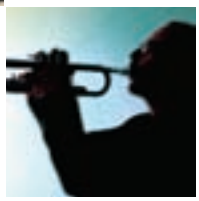






These cities offered a sense of tolerance and accommodation to most groups. Inclusion often extended among groups with similar characteristics. As time passed, inclusion expanded to more diverse groups but continued to isolate newcomers. In New Orleans, inclusion centered on a shared religion; similarly, commerce united peoples in Odesa. Unfortunately, some groups continued to remain marginalized. Restrictive measures harmed their relationship with the overall community but strengthened the bond of their own networks, leading to economic advancement and eventually to wider social inclusion.

Unique cosmopolitan features continue to define New Orleans and Odesa in historic and contemporary imagery. Primarily, artistic expression distinguished these cities from their counterparts. Jazz and *Mardi gras* celebrations illustrate the mixture of diverse cultures in New Orleans. Music also defined Odesa's contribution to European culture. Famous composers, pianists, and violinists elevated the city's musical heritage and contribution to high culture. Notable writers such as Anna Akhmatova, Isaac Babel, and Yuri Olesha all lived in Odesa.

Although New Orleans and Odesa are separated by bodies of water, similar historical paths have united them. Intermixes of urban architecture define the superficial exterior of the cities. However, the close contact of diverse social identities allows these cities to embrace varied national origins while elaborating a unique urban identity.

NEW ORLEANS

Situated on the bank of the Mississippi River, this city was valuable for its close proximity to the Gulf of Mexico and trade in the New World. Although the first French settlers colonized nearby areas in 1699, the city of New Orleans was not established until many years later when Jean-Baptise Le Moyne de Bienville led his colonizers into this area. Officially, the city of Nouvelle Orleans, named in honor of the Regent, was established in 1718. The urban layout displaying a grid pattern of streets and city blocks was completed in 1723, and within a year New Orleans was crowned capital of Louisiana.

In the 18th century, the various alliances and wars of England, Spain, and France placed New Orleans in the hands of different rulers. In 1762, Charles III of Spain received Louisiana from his cousin, French King Louis XV. Under Spanish ownership, civic and economic development flourished by granting farm ownership, building roads and levees, and abolishing Indian slavery. As a result of another shift in alliances, France regained New Orleans in 1801. Nonetheless, Napoleon's unyielding focus on European domination allowed the United States' to acquire Louisiana in 1803.

New Orleans' population grew between the 1820s and the Civil War. Trade and the invention of the steamboat transformed the Mississippi Valley into an essential port of commerce. As cotton and sugarcane production increased, these industries attracted people from all over the United States. It is estimated that between 1820 and 1860, one million people passed through the city. During the Civil War, New Orleans was the largest city in the Confederacy. This urban growth also hosted and inspired artists, musicians, and poets.

However, the arrival of new peoples to New Orleans occurred prior to the 19th century. Native Americans assisted the French colonizers during their first discovery of the Mississippi River. As the French established the area, their cultural and religious traditions attracted additional groups to the region. In the 1770s, the Acadians fled persecution from Canada and relocated to New Orleans as refugees. This group and their practices, commonly referred to as Cajun, are a pillar of New Orleans heritage.

As a French city, New Orleans did experience transitional obstacles under various political regimes. French was the dominant language and cultural tradition throughout the city's imperial history even under Spanish reign. In fact, when the United States acquired New Orleans, English was considered a foreign language.

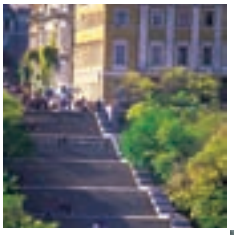
Furthermore, Catholicism retained special status in the city as the official religion of France. This protection allowed Catholicism to flourish in New Orleans, which distinguished the city from other Protestant colonial establishments. The city's strong Catholic connection was strengthened as waves of immigrants arrived from Italy, Ireland, Haiti, and Vietnam. Meanwhile, other nationalities and religious groups also initiated services in New Orleans, although it often created tension among the populations.

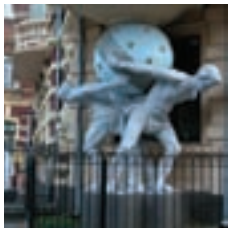
Traditions from African peoples also constituted part of New Orleans' unique culture. The city hosted both freed and enslaved Africans. The origins of jazz are attributed to practices at slave gatherings, where native songs and dances were performed with traditional instruments. As jazz evolved, rhythms from African, Caribbean, Spanish, and French music contributed to the genre. Louis Armstrong, one of the most famous jazz musicians and a native son of the place, literally made a name for himself in New Orleans, as a city park and the city's airport are named for him.

Additionally, New Orleans is home to a unique carnival celebration of masquerades and festivals: *Mardi gras*. This French term, meaning "Fat Tuesday," denotes the last day before the Lenten Fast. Common tradition holds that *Mardi gras* has been performed since the early 1700s, although the first public holiday was celebrated in 1827. Local organizations, known as *krewes*, each sponsor floats in the parade. The traditional festive colors of purple, green, and gold are believed to be associated with Grand Duke Alexander Alexandrovich Romanov's visit to the city in 1872.

The performance, architecture, and people of New Orleans overlap in many commonalities but it is this blending that creates a unique city culture. These traditions and ethnicities have coexisted and preserved historical awareness for three centuries—and are still visible in the city today. Like the old French Quarter that displays Spanish architectural beauty with iron metal works, vibrant colors, and lush gardens, the city defines itself with exclusive landmarks. This common collective historical past allows new groups to redefine New Orleans culture and its place in American society.

ODESA/ODESSA





Odesa is at the crossroads of numerous civilizations, intersecting from the north, east, south, and west. Over several centuries, this area was occupied by the Greeks, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Crimean Khanate, and the Ottoman Empire. Originally founded as a Russian imperial city and now part of independent Ukraine, the spelling of the city's name remains contentious among diverse ethnic groups claiming it as their own (*Odesa* in Ukrainian and *Odessa* in Russian).

Russia received this territory from the Ottomans in the Treaty of Jassy, which ended the Russo-Turkish War (1787–1792). Immediately afterward, Russian Empress Catherine the Great conceptualized a new city at the edge of her empire on the Black Sea. Officially established in 1794, Odesa developed as a naval and commercial port. Legend contends that Catherine insisted on a feminine city—perhaps deriving from the Greek city name of Odessos. Odesa was capital of *Novorossiya* or New Russia, part of Russia's ever-expanding empire. Considered a founding father of the city, Duc de Richelieu governed Odesa from 1803 to 1814. He is credited with planning the layout and infrastructure of the city, although two internationalists—soldier Jose de Ribas and engineer Franz de Voland—actually designed the city to mirror the grid patterns of emerging 18th century European cities.

The architectural design and feel of the city recalls that of many western cities. The influences of French, Italian, and Mediterranean design are still evident in Odesa today. Alexander Pushkin commented that you can "smell Europe" in the city, where French was spoken and international newspapers sold. Likewise, Mark Twain recorded that he felt at home in Odesa because it was reminiscent of Midwestern American towns with broad, straight streets. The cosmopolitan nature of the city attracted writers, composers, and artists from around the world, thereby enriching its overall high culture.

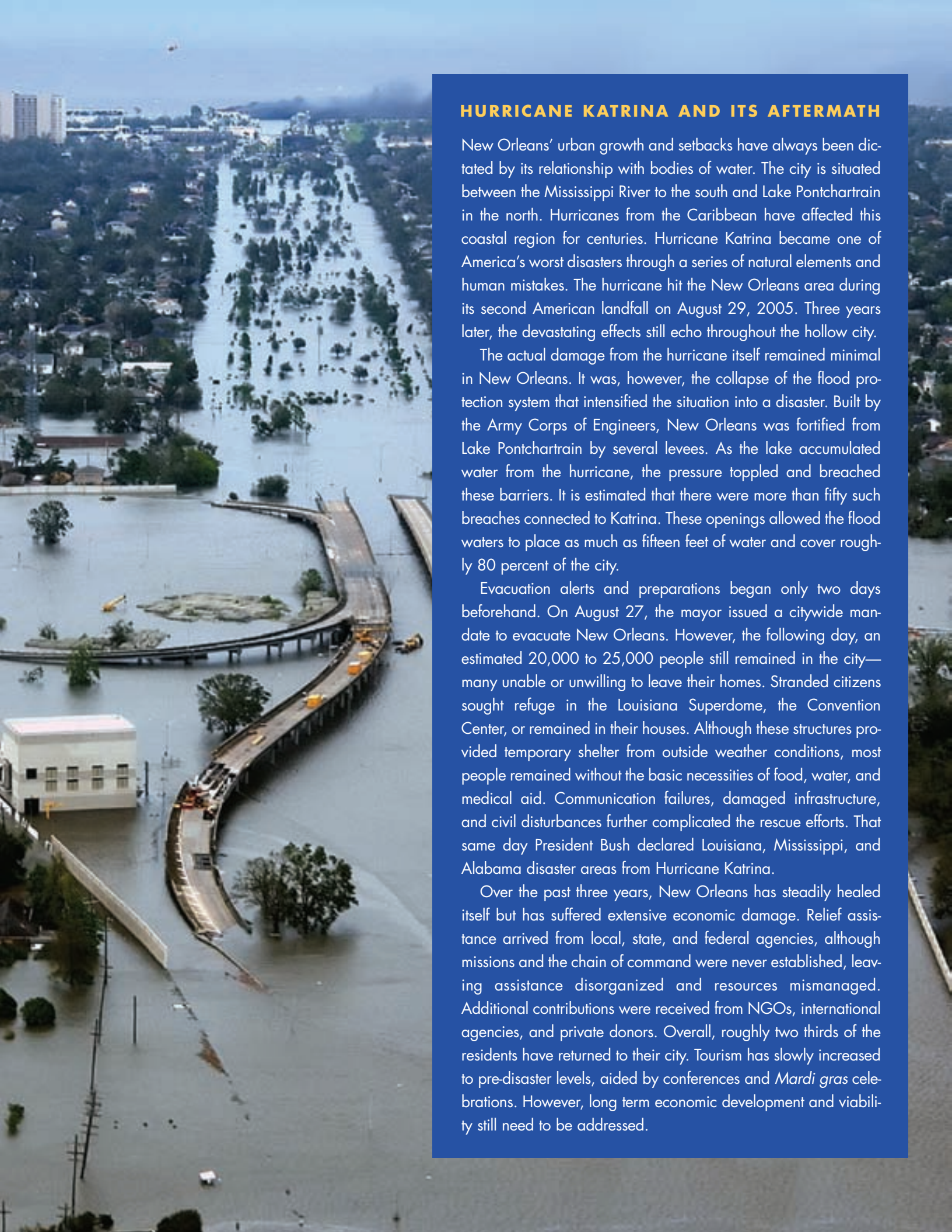
From 1819–1858, Odesa was designated *porto franco*—a free port for economic trade. Immense commercial growth elevated Odesa to the fourth largest city in the Russian Empire in the 19th century, behind Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Warsaw. The only period of disrupted growth was from 1853–1856 as a result of the Crimean War. For most of its history, this port remained a leader of manufacturing, exporting, and shipping. In 2000, Odesa reclaimed its special status and now serves as a zone for free economic trade in Ukraine.

Diverse ethnic groups filtered into the city for new economic opportunities. International tradesmen opened businesses encouraged by the port's special status. Additionally, Odesa lured peoples with special incentives. The city offered special protection to runaway serfs and Cossacks. Likewise, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Frenchmen, Italians, Germans, and Romanians relocated for economic advancement.

Although the city is credited with many social and cultural accommodations, these freedoms were not achieved easily. When the city was founded, it was essentially divided into two sections. With the influx of different nationalities, the overall society remained highly fragmented although it possessed a progressive degree of tolerance for its time. Unfortunately, the Jewish population retained an "otherness," even though by 1897, one third of the population identified as Jewish. Under the Russian Empire, Odesa was the site of countless violent anti-Jewish pogroms incited by mobs and officials.

The city experienced additional challenges as the 20th century continued. During the Bolshevik Revolution and World War I, the city was occupied by competing national armies. Similarly, during World War II, the Axis powers devastated the population, notably during the Odesan Siege in 1944 when 60,000 people were massacred or deported. Although the infrastructure remained virtually untouched, the human capital was severely diminished. In the 1960s and 1970s, the city rebuilt itself through an influx of rural Ukrainians and members of other Soviet nationalities, again adding an element of diversity to its demographics. In 1991, the unexpected collapse of the USSR threw Odesa into an unknown future. Now a part of independent Ukraine, the city has overcome political and economic transitions, and has reclaimed its status as a leading urban center.

* For the purpose of this publication, the Kennan Institute will refer to the city as *Odesa* according to the Ukrainian language spelling.



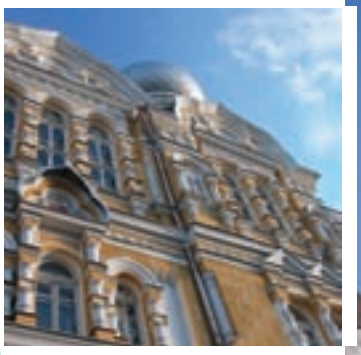
HURRICANE KATRINA AND ITS AFTERMATH

New Orleans' urban growth and setbacks have always been dictated by its relationship with bodies of water. The city is situated between the Mississippi River to the south and Lake Pontchartrain in the north. Hurricanes from the Caribbean have affected this coastal region for centuries. Hurricane Katrina became one of America's worst disasters through a series of natural elements and human mistakes. The hurricane hit the New Orleans area during its second American landfall on August 29, 2005. Three years later, the devastating effects still echo throughout the hollow city.

The actual damage from the hurricane itself remained minimal in New Orleans. It was, however, the collapse of the flood protection system that intensified the situation into a disaster. Built by the Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans was fortified from Lake Pontchartrain by several levees. As the lake accumulated water from the hurricane, the pressure toppled and breached these barriers. It is estimated that there were more than fifty such breaches connected to Katrina. These openings allowed the flood waters to place as much as fifteen feet of water and cover roughly 80 percent of the city.

Evacuation alerts and preparations began only two days beforehand. On August 27, the mayor issued a citywide mandate to evacuate New Orleans. However, the following day, an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 people still remained in the city—many unable or unwilling to leave their homes. Stranded citizens sought refuge in the Louisiana Superdome, the Convention Center, or remained in their houses. Although these structures provided temporary shelter from outside weather conditions, most people remained without the basic necessities of food, water, and medical aid. Communication failures, damaged infrastructure, and civil disturbances further complicated the rescue efforts. That same day President Bush declared Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama disaster areas from Hurricane Katrina.

Over the past three years, New Orleans has steadily healed itself but has suffered extensive economic damage. Relief assistance arrived from local, state, and federal agencies, although missions and the chain of command were never established, leaving assistance disorganized and resources mismanaged. Additional contributions were received from NGOs, international agencies, and private donors. Overall, roughly two thirds of the residents have returned to their city. Tourism has slowly increased to pre-disaster levels, aided by conferences and *Mardi gras* celebrations. However, long term economic development and viability still need to be addressed.



KENNAN INSTITUTE PROGRAMMING

The natural connections between New Orleans and Odesa are abundant but often overlooked. In early 2005, the Kennan Institute, in conjunction with Tulane University (New Orleans) and Odesa National University, proposed a conference to examine the urbaneness of these two cities. However, destiny possessed alternate plans, as Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in August 2005.

After a slow recovery, partner organizations have reconceptualized the conference programming to include additional areas of scholarship and outreach. Individual seminars examining New Orleans and Odesa have occurred over the past few years. In New Orleans, American experts presented their research analyzing the common paths of New Orleans and Odesa. The Kennan Institute has produced a collection of these papers as part of its Occasional Paper series.

Beyond the cultural diversity in the cities, another prominent theme concerns struggle and recovery during crises. The Odesa experience following the collapse of the Soviet Union provides an array of lessons learned for New Orleans. In particular, the survival of artistic expression remains crucial once an infrastructure collapses. Arts often fall as the first victims when there are financial constraints in communities. Odesan artists learned this lesson following the demise of Soviet support for their cultural programming.

Likewise, New Orleans faced the difficult challenge of supporting local artists following Hurricane Katrina. Artistic communities have united to provide international assistance. An international residency exchange program has been discussed to provide New Orleans performers, musicians, and artists the opportunity to teach, practice, and interact with gifted counterparts in Ukraine. Likewise, following the American exchange, Ukrainian artists would have the opportunity to study the arts in New Orleans. This program offers the unique interaction to preserve as well as strengthen each city's cultural heritage.

In memory of the Katrina devastation, the Odesa Symphony Orchestra will honor New Orleans during their 2008 City Day celebration. Special programming concerning New Orleans will be available for Odesa residents to experience this American city's unique legacy.