

17th Annual Louisiana Studies Conference

“Louisiana Dramas”

September 13, 2025

Conference Keynote Presentation: Sean Bartley, Associate Professor of Theatre History,
Northwestern State University

Conference Co-Chairs: Donna J. Baker, University Archivist and Records Officer,
Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Northwestern State University

Jason Church, Chief, Technical Services, National Center for
Preservation Technology and Training

Daniel Gordy, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice and English,
Northwestern State University

Charles Pellegrin, Professor of History and Director of the Southern
Studies Institute, Northwestern State University

Shane Rasmussen, Director of the Louisiana Folklife Center and
Professor of English, Northwestern State University

Conference Programming: Jason Church, Chair

Shane Rasmussen

Conference Hosts: Scott Burrell, Director, The Dear School of Creative and Performing Arts and
Professor of Theatre. Northwestern State University

Leslie Gruesbeck, Associate Professor of Art and Chair, Department of Fine
+ Graphic Arts, Northwestern State University

Francene Lemoine, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Northwestern
State University

NSU Louisiana High School Essay Contest: Shane Rasmussen, Chair

Jason Church

Daniel Gordy

Rebecca Macijeski, Creative Writing Program
Coordinator and Associate Professor of English,
Northwestern State University

Shea Montgomery, Instructor of English,
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Saturday's luncheon provided by Sodexo.

Conference Sponsors

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Special thanks to the many other people who graciously donated their time and talents to the Conference.

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Please note: All events take place in CAPA (Creative and Performing Arts)

Saturday, September 13, 2025

8:00-9:00 a.m.	Conference Registration, CAPA, 2 nd Floor
9:00-9:15 a.m.	Conference Welcome, CAPA 206
9:30-10:45 a.m.	Presentation Session 1, CAPA
11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Keynote Presentation, Magale Recital Hall
12:00-12:30 p.m.	Awards Ceremony, Magale Recital Hall
	17 th Annual NSU Louisiana High School Essay Contest
12:30-1:45 p.m.	Light Lunch and Reception, Hanchey Gallery
2:00-3:15 p.m.	Presentation Session 2, CAPA
3:30-4:45 p.m.	Presentation Session 3, CAPA
4:45 p.m.	Conference Close

SCHEDULE

Please note: All events take place in CAPA (Creative and Performing Arts)

Saturday, September 13, 2025

8:00-9:00 a.m. **Conference Registration** ***CAPA, 2nd Floor***

9:00-9:15 a.m. **Conference Welcome** ***CAPA 206***

9:30-10:45 a.m. **Presentation Session 1**

Panel 1A Louisiana Literatures CAPA 205

Session Chair: Robert C. Petersen, Middle Tennessee State University

Lisa A. Kirby, Collin College

“The Drama of Displacement: *The Floating World* and Geographical Trauma in Post-Katrina New Orleans”

Robert C. Petersen, Middle Tennessee State University

“‘A human medley’ in New Orleans’: Joseph Holt Ingraham’s *The South-West by a Yankee* (1835)”

Sumor Ziva Sheppard, Prairie View A&M University

“A Discovery of Penance: Reverberations of Spanish Racialization and Louisianans as Powerful Agents of Change in Harkness’ *All Souls* Series”

Panel 1B Louisiana Past CAPA 206

Session Chair: Conan Mills, Louisiana State University

Dean Sinclair, Northwestern State University

“The Tip of the Spear: Camp Sabine and the Beginnings of Manifest Destiny”

Conan Mills, Louisiana State University

“An Archaeological Field School at the Louisiana Seminary of Learning and Military Academy (16RA49): Digging into Louisiana’s Early Higher Education”

Michael Martin, Nicholls State University

“‘The Center of the Land’: Southeastern Native American Mythology, Intra-Tribal Confederacy, and Ethnography in the Nineteenth Century”

Panel 1C Page, Stage, and Civic Space: CAPA 207
Performance, Identity, and Historical Imagination in Natchitoches

Session Chair: Chris Gilson, Northwestern State University

Kent W. Peacock, Northwestern State University

“Theatrical Performance and Spaces as Civic Pride, Controversy, and Progress in Turn of the 20th Century Natchitoches, Louisiana”

James MacDonald, Northwestern State University

“An Author of Good Fortune: Ruth Cross and the Struggles of St. Denis”

Chris Gilson, Northwestern State University

“‘Music and Light are Around Me’: Paul Green and the Natchitoches Symphonic Drama, Louisiana Cavalier”

Panel 1D Educating Louisiana Magale Recital Hall

Session Chair: Benjamin Forkner, Northwestern State University

Randall Dupont, LSU Alexandria

“Minimum Standards, Maximum Outrage: The 1954 Dispute Over Progressive Education in St. Landry Parish”

Benjamin Forkner, Northwestern State University

“What can the ‘no sabo kids’ learn from the Louisiana French experience?”

Timothy Bratt, Northwestern State University

Ashley Haire, Northwestern State University

McKenna Marsh, Northwestern State University

“Culinary Diplomacy: Exploring Louisiana’s Rich Culinary History”

Dr. Katrina Jordan, Northwestern State University

Dr. Michelle Fazio-Brunson, Northwestern State University

Dr. April Giddens, Northwestern State University

Dr. Debra Jo Hailey, Northwestern State University

“The Ready Start Natchitoches Network: Dreaming of a Bright Future for Children and Their Families in Louisiana”

11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Keynote Presentation

Magale Recital Hall

Sean Bartley, Northwestern State University

**“A Mythical State We Call Louisiana:
Place, Politics, and Performance in *Louisiana Purchase*”**

In *Louisiana Purchase* (1940) legendary Broadway composer Irving Berlin and his collaborators, librettist Morrie Ryskind and producer B.G. DeSylva, savagely satirized Huey Long (known to his allies and enemies alike as “The Kingfish”) and the corrupt Democratic Party officials who dominated Louisiana Politics in the late 1920s and 1930s. But in the musical’s two opening numbers, the characters claim that they have set their story “in New Orleans / a city we’ve invented / so that there would be no fuss. / If there is such a place, it’s certainly news to us.” Berlin’s score and Ryskind’s libretto construct a “mythical” Louisiana that reflects national anxieties about corruption, populism, and regional identity during the New Deal era. The show is paradoxically a quintessential “Louisiana Drama” and a total imposter, created by collaborators who had never visited the Pelican State who based their depiction on the popular culture depictions of earlier eras. Sean Bartley will explore how in *Louisiana Purchase*, Berlin, Ryskind, and DeSylva twisted the conventions of the Broadway musical comedy and utilized the simultaneously real and imagined setting of New Orleans to soften the sting of their satirical take on political life. His lecture will be punctuated by video of musical numbers from the 1941 Paramount Pictures film adaptation (starring Bob Hope) and two live scenes directed and performed by NSU Theatre and Dance students. The scenes are directed by Liz Bonnette, with performers KeShaun Bridgewater, Jezek Maxwell, Haleigh Miller, Amaya Perkins, and Tyler Sibley.

Sean Bartley is an Associate Professor of Theatre History from Andover, Massachusetts. His research centers on contemporary experiential and immersive theatre practices, postdigital pedagogy, and the intersections of sport and performance. He is the co-editor (with William Lewis) of *Experiential Theatres: Praxis-Based Approaches to Training 21st Century Theatre Artists* and the series *Advances in*

Experiential Media and Performance. His work has been featured in collections with Routledge, Methuen, and Northwestern University Press and in *TDR: The Drama Review*, *Theatre History Studies*, and *Theatre Journal*. Directing credits for NSU include *The Government Inspector*, *Antigone*, *RoosevElvis*, and the *2024 Christmas Gala*. He holds a PhD in Theatre Studies from Florida State University and an MFA in Dramaturgy from the American Repertory Theatre/Moscow Art Theatre School Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University.

12:00-12:30 p.m. ***Awards Ceremony*** ***Magale Recital Hall***
17th Annual NSU Louisiana High School Essay Contest

12:30-1:45 p.m. **Light Lunch and Reception** ***Hanchey Gallery***

2:00-3:15 p.m. **Presentation Session 2**

Panel 2A ***Louisiana Theater*** ***CAPA 205***

Session Chair: John Doucet, Nicholls State University

John Doucet, Nicholls State University

“Incidental Music: Autobiography of a Decade of Playwriting”

Anna Kathryn Vaughn, Northwestern State University

“A Night at the Theater: Community Theaters in Louisiana”

Marcy M. Frantom, Independent Researcher

“Wide-ranging Research Interests of Archaeologist Robert W. Neuman, author of *An Introduction to Louisiana Archaeology* (1984)”

Panel 2B ***Narratives of Underrepresented Communities*** ***CAPA 206***

Session Chair: Clayton Delery, Faculty Emeritus, Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts

Gabriele A. Williams, National Center for Preservation Technology and Training / Cane River National Heritage Area

“The Power of the Past: How Underrepresented Communities’ Stories Can Help Us Progress Forward”

Adelaide Soileau, ARGO Lab and NCPTT

“Teaching Community Youth to Document their History and the Built Environment Using Remote Systems”

Clayton Delery, Faculty Emeritus, Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts

“From Franciscan Friars to Demented Women: How A Small Queer Ministry Fought Against AIDS”

Panel 2C Framing Dance, Film, Poetry

CAPA 207

Session Chair: Bernard Gallagher, Louisiana State University of Alexandria

Robin G. Parson, Oral Historian / Cultural Ambassador & Choreographer

“Creole Folk Dance and the Evolution of ‘Jass to Jazz’ Dance”

Jon Griffin Donlon, Independent Scholar

“Framing the Authentic and the Inauthentic: Louisiana’s Cultures, History, Literature, Peoples, and Places in the Movies”

Heather Salter Dromm, Northwestern State University

“‘Slap that Dough’: The Past, Present, and Future of Fry Bread in Native American Communities”

Bernard Gallagher, Louisiana State University of Alexandria

“Empty Spaces”

***Panel 2D New Scholarship on the Far-Right in
Louisiana in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: A Panel Discussion***

Magale Recital Hall

Session Chair: Sarah McFarland, Northwestern State University

Michael S. Martin, University of Louisiana-Lafayette

Charles Pellegrin, Northwestern State University

Mark Melder, Northwestern State University

3:30-4:45 p.m. Presentation Session 3

Panel 3A Plays in Louisiana

CAPA 205

Session Chair: Bruce R. Magee, Louisiana Tech University

Bruce R. Magee, Louisiana Tech University

Stephen Payne, Independent Scholar

“Law and Disorder in *Liberty in Louisiana*”

Gene Slepov, College of Staten Island, City University of New York

“The Drama of Place in Lower Plaquemines in E.P. O’Donnell’s *The Great Big Doorstep*”

Adrienne Vivian, Seminole State College of Florida

“Theater and Drama in Two New Orleans Stories”

Derek Foster, Upper Iowa University, Alexandria

“‘The ineffaceable curse of Cain’: A [Re]Evaluation of Sensational Melodrama in Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon*”

Panel 3B *Legacies of Natchitoches*

CAPA 206

Session Chair: Donna J. Baker, Northwestern State University

Donna J. Baker, Northwestern State University

“Drama in the Archives! Louisiana Dramas found at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center”

Kathryn Gentry, Northwestern State University

“Truvy’s Beauty Salon: A ‘Classroom’ of Life Experiences and Cultural Exchanges in Robert Harling’s *Steel Magnolias*”

Randolph J. Deaton IV, Retired FBI Special Agent and Art Crime Team Member

“A Legacy at Risk: The Art of Louisiana Folk Artist Clementine Hunter and its Vulnerability to Fraud and Forgery”

Maxwell L. Turner, Singer-Songwriter

“Big Max Turner: The Country Blues of Natchitoches”

Panel 3C *Trauma, Folklore, and Healing*

CAPA 207

Session Chair: Keith Dromm, Louisiana Scholars' College at Northwestern State University

Keith Dromm, Louisiana Scholars' College at Northwestern State University

"Epidemics and Epistemic Injustice: Kazan's *Panic in the Streets*"

Allison Shaver, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

"Trauma and Transformation: *My Louisiana Sky*'s Coming-of-Age Narrative"

Pamela Elaine Lockridge, Independent Scholar

"The Rougarou Festival as a Means to Mass Communicating the Current Drama in Louisiana Courts for Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse"

4:45 p.m.

Conference Close

PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

Donna J. Baker, Northwestern State University

“Drama in the Archives! Louisiana Dramas found at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center”

Many visitors to Natchitoches know that the film *Steel Magnolias* by Robert Harling was filmed around town. Natchitoches, however, has connections to dramatic works beyond this one piece. Visitors and researchers alike may not know all that can be found relating to literature, theater, and film at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center. From photographs, papers, and artifacts pertaining to the films shot in Natchitoches, to records capturing NSU’s and Natchitoches’ theater scene, to drafts of plays and dramatic works from donors or students, a variety of material is open to the public for research. Head Archivist Donna Baker will give an overview of the collections that align this year’s theme “Louisiana Dramas.”

Sean Bartley, Northwestern State University

“A Mythical State We Call Louisiana: Place, Politics, and Performance in *Louisiana Purchase*”

In *Louisiana Purchase* (1940) legendary Broadway composer Irving Berlin and his collaborators, librettist Morrie Ryskind and producer B.G. DeSylva, savagely satirized Huey Long (known to his allies and enemies alike as “The Kingfish”) and the corrupt Democratic Party officials who dominated Louisiana Politics in the late 1920s and 1930s. But in the musical’s two opening numbers, the characters claim that they have set their story “in New Orleans / a city we’ve invented / so that there would be no fuss. / If there is such a place, it’s certainly news to us.” Berlin’s score and Ryskind’s libretto construct a “mythical” Louisiana that reflects national anxieties about corruption, populism, and regional identity during the New Deal era. The show is paradoxically a quintessential “Louisiana Drama” and a total imposter, created by collaborators who had never visited the Pelican State who based their depiction on the popular culture depictions of earlier eras. Sean Bartley will explore how in *Louisiana Purchase*, Berlin, Ryskind, and DeSylva twisted the conventions of the Broadway musical comedy and utilized the simultaneously real and imagined setting of New Orleans to soften the sting of their satirical take on political life. His lecture will be punctuated by video of musical numbers from the 1941 Paramount Pictures film adaptation (starring Bob Hope) and two live scenes directed and performed by NSU Theatre and Dance students. The scenes are directed by Liz Bonnette, with performers KeShaun Bridgewater, Jezek Maxwell, Haleigh Miller, Amaya Perkins, and Tyler Sibley.

Timothy Bratt, Northwestern State University

Ashley Haire, Northwestern State University

McKenna Marsh, Northwestern State University

“Culinary Diplomacy: Exploring Louisiana’s Rich Culinary History”

This presentation explores the theoretical foundations and practical applications of culinary diplomacy, using Louisiana's rich culinary heritage as a framework for enhancing cross-cultural understanding in undergraduate education. Culinary diplomacy, defined as the strategic use of food culture to promote cultural exchange and build relationships, operates on the core idea that “the easiest way to win hearts and minds is through the stomach” (Rockower, 2012). Louisiana's unique cuisine, influenced by French, Spanish, African, Native American, and Caribbean cultures, serves as an ideal case study for examining how regional food traditions act as vehicles for cultural storytelling and identity formation.

The presentation examines how Louisiana’s culinary landscape functions as a cultural bridge, transcending traditional boundaries through shared food experiences. Through hands-on practice and sensory learning involving regional ingredients and cooking traditions, culinary diplomacy engages multiple learning styles while fostering a deeper appreciation for Louisiana's complex cultural heritage. The methodology includes storytelling around iconic dishes like gumbo, jambalaya, and beignets, experiential learning activities such as spice identification and traditional cooking techniques, and interactive sessions that connect personal food memories to broader regional narratives.

Key applications for undergraduate education include Louisiana history and culture courses, anthropology and sociology programs that examine cultural fusion, hospitality and tourism education, and community engagement initiatives that celebrate regional identity. This framework addresses gaps in traditional cultural education by providing concrete, sensory-rich entry points for exploring Louisiana’s multicultural foundations, which resonate across diverse student populations and learning preferences.

Drawing from recent scholarship in cultural diplomacy and place-based pedagogy, this presentation demonstrates how Louisiana’s culinary experiences can serve as catalysts for developing cultural literacy, regional pride, and an appreciation for cultural diversity. The approach recognizes Louisiana cuisine as not merely regional fare but as a powerful medium for conveying historical narratives, social practices, and the ongoing evolution of Louisiana’s unique cultural identity.

Randolph J. Deaton IV, Retired FBI Special Agent and Art Crime Team Member

“A Legacy at Risk: The Art of Louisiana Folk Artist Clementine Hunter and its Vulnerability to Fraud and Forgery”

Despite efforts to protect the legacy of Louisiana folk artist Clementine Hunter, her art remains significantly vulnerable to fraud and forgery. Since at least the early 1970’s, three major criminal conspiracies involving multiple forgers resulted in hundreds, and quite possibly thousands, of Hunter forgeries being sold to an unknown number of victims. Only one of these conspiracies was ever thoroughly investigated and resulted in the arrests and prosecutions of its perpetrators, and to this day, is still the only publicly known criminal case of its kind conducted by any U.S. law enforcement agency. The investigation achieved a number of firsts such as the creation of an

archive of Hunter forgeries. Science, not just connoisseurship, was also used for the first time to perform a comparative analysis of questionable works to authentic Hunter paintings in support of a criminal investigation. Definitive proof of the existence of a long-suspected female forger, a rare occurrence in art crime, was also finally uncovered. Numerous interviews of victims, collectors, art market participants, subject matter experts, and even the forger himself, and considerable research into Hunter and her techniques, identified the combination of factors which allowed such a conspiracy and others to be successful for so long. Some of these factors include Hunter's extremely large oeuvre, no available catalog raisonné for Hunter, a significant number of forgeries already in existence and in private hands through private transactions, a lack of interest by law enforcement, and reliance on mostly connoisseurship for authentication. Using information derived from the aforementioned investigation and other research conducted on art crime, my presentation will explore the reasons why Hunter's art has been so vulnerable to fraud and forgery in the past and why it will be even more so in the future.

Clayton Delery, Faculty Emeritus, Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts

“From Franciscan Friars to Demented Women: How A Small Queer Ministry Fought Against AIDS”

In the late 1970's, a member of the Order of Franciscans Minor (OFM) started an unlikely ministry in New Orleans. Father Robert (Bob) Pawell quietly started a ministry for LGBT+ people in a small shotgun house on the edge of the French Quarter. The ministry was known as Tau House. It had already been in operation for several years, and had attracted a small but supportive congregation, when many of its members began experiencing a disease that, in the early years, did not have a name. It was first called “the new gay cancer,” before it was called Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID), until it finally got its final name: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

The disease was so feared, and the affected population so stigmatized, both by the Catholic Church and by society at large, that Father Bob and largely found himself running an unofficial hospice from Tau House. Working with other priests, and largely under the radar, Father Bob convinced the archdiocese to give him a floor in an otherwise unused facility to house people with AIDS. The location of this facility remained a carefully guarded secret, but groups of local activists, including the drag troupe known as the Demented Women, helped Project Lazarus become operable.

Jon Griffin Donlon, Independent Scholar

“Framing the Authentic and the Inauthentic: Louisiana's Cultures, History, Literature, Peoples, and Places in the Movies”

In this paper I will discuss identifiable circumstances nested in the normal creation and production of commercial films which “frame” or present a form of meaning authentic, inauthentic, perhaps hybridized yet essentially commodifying of Louisiana's cultures, history, literature, peoples, and places. This agenda may not always be intentional, but with key-plot observation, many fit this contour.

I published a short article “Selluloid Myth Takes: ‘We Been Framed!’ Louisiana in the Movies,” in 2012, and back then, with some prescience, I explained that I intended to discuss the first decades of the Louisiana Motion picture Tax Incentive Act. But providentially I also commented that “placing the larger body of work into the context of recent productivity seems to suggest that filmmaking may be a useful tool . . . for anthropologists, sociologists and especially folklorists by giving researchers insight into both consumer desires and perceptions of the state.” This is especially salient with the theme of this year’s Louisiana Studies Conference in mind.

Later, I massively enlarged my earlier probe. About two years ago I published a preliminary reference book dealing with film production in the Boot State; it was a transformative experience. Taking that deep dive into how Louisiana’s cultures, its history, literature, peoples, and its places are “framed” in film is all too much like investigating how the sausage is made. Indeed, after reviewing decades of work and hundreds of releases, I’m wondering how profound the Hawthorne effect might be. In this paper I intend to briefly discuss how the mere presence and production of film interacts with cultures, history, literature, peoples, and places.

John Doucet, Nicholls State University

“Incidental Music: Autobiography of a Decade of Playwriting”

For generations, people of the south-central wetlands region of Louisiana have been bound by oral traditions of storytelling in their native languages. As recently as two generations ago, their grandparents’ first and only language was French, a tradition disrupted by a 1916 statute forbidding use of languages other than English in public school classrooms. Despite the land serving as setting for an occasional screenplay or novel, there is a distinct paucity of literature written by native-born individuals whose regional memory and vision could generate the only truly authentic voice. Over the past 30 years, I have written a number of works representing the Lafourche wetlands as well as the people with whom I share a geography, history, and culture. Beginning in 1993 with “*Tant que Durera la Terre*,” based on narratives of the great Cheniere Hurricane of 1893, and ending in 2023 with *Mullet Songs*, the official play of the Lafourche Parish Bicentennial, I composed (and produced or co-produced) 12 theatrical plays set largely in this region of Louisiana. Writing these scripts was incidental to my primary work as an NIH-funded postdoctoral fellow in molecular genetics (through 1997) and an assistant professor of genetics at Nicholls State University (beginning in 1997), though this work often carefully infused the plays. Along the way, I was awarded the Louisiana Native Voices and Visions Playwriting Award and the Louisiana Division of the Arts Fellowship in Theater—Playwriting. Playing at small venues across coastal Louisiana, the plays have reached audiences of nearly 25,000. In reflecting on and speaking about this decade of playwriting, my hope is to demonstrate to and encourage others to preserve untold and perhaps disappearing Louisiana histories. In coastal Lafourche, as we continue to face loss of land and communities, the effort toward indigenous literature like these plays is not only important but also urgent.

Heather Salter Dromm, Northwestern State University

“Slap that Dough’: The Past, Present, and Future of Fry Bread in Native American Communities”

In the FX series *Reservation Dogs* that aired August 2021 to September 2023, fictional recording artist Punkin Lusty compares a beautiful “rezzy” girl to frybread and claims that “she is hotter than a pan of fry bread grease.” He ends the song with “Greasy Greasy Frybread/Sweat drippin’ down her face/Working on a stove top . . . Slap that dough/Watch that grease pop.” In other episodes of *Reservation Dogs* fry bread plays a part in depicting the way in which traditions are passed down to younger generations and tribal members come together in times of both shared joy and sadness. In many places, both real and imagined, fry bread is fervently celebrated as an important and necessary food source.

However, for others, fry bread represents a dark time in Native American history and for this reason, in addition to its poor nutritional content, they neither eat it nor serve it to others. One such person is Chef Ben Jacobs, a member of the Osage nation. Jacobs serves traditional food from his culture at his restaurant *Tocabe* in Denver but not fry bread because he sees it as a product of colonialism and forced migration and not a historical part of Native American diets before the arrival of European settlers. Many others, including Choctaw historian and writer Devon A. Mihesuah, have criticized fry bread for contributing to health problems, such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. In my essay, I will explore the significant past and future of fry bread in Native American communities with a main focus on Louisiana tribes, including my own, the Choctaw Apache of Ebarb. I also will examine whether fry bread has a place in the Native American fight for food sovereignty.

Keith Dromm, Louisiana Scholars’ College at Northwestern State University

“Epidemics and Epistemic Injustice: Kazan’s *Panic in the Streets*”

Elia Kazan’s *Panic in the Streets* (1950) follows Dr. Clint Reed of the U.S. Public Health Service as he races to prevent the spread of pneumonic plague in New Orleans. A corpse pulled from the docks is found to be infected, prompting Reed to track down the killers—who may themselves be carriers—before they ignite an epidemic. With a skeptical police officer in tow, Reed searches the immigrant and working-class communities of the city. Though initially dismissed by city authorities and met with suspicion by locals, Reed ultimately succeeds; science and rational inquiry are presented as triumphant over ignorance and anachronistic incredulity.

However, that message is undermined by the film’s portrayal of working-class and immigrant populations as suspicious, insular, and superstitious. An *epistemic injustice* is committed against those populations by depicting them as unreliable testifiers. As the philosopher Miranda Fricker would put it, they are assigned an “identity-prejudicial credibility deficit”¹ because of their social and ethnic status. This prejudice is depicted early in the film when members of these communities are called into the police station for questioning. It turns into an exercise in harassment rather than information gathering, because the police dismiss everything they are told. These groups are repeatedly represented as untrustworthy in the film.

The epistemic injustice against them is both practically and theoretically in tension with the film's promotion of medical science. Controlling epidemics requires trust in the affected population in order to implement mitigation measures like contact tracing. The perpetuation of stereotypes undercuts the film's promotion of science.

Kazan's own biography adds another layer of tension. An immigrant who later testified before HUAC, Kazan was complicit in casting immigrants as vectors not just of disease, but of dangerous ideas. Setting the film in New Orleans, a city long imagined as a locus of both medical and cultural contagion, reinforces these tropes. In the end, *Panic in the Streets* undermines its own message by committing epistemic injustice.

1. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford UP, 2007, p. 28.

Randall Dupont, LSU Alexandria

“Minimum Standards, Maximum Outrage: The 1954 Dispute Over Progressive Education in St. Landry Parish”

In 1954, a small rural high school in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, became the epicenter of a fierce conflict over educational philosophy. When Robert Olivier, assistant principal at Washington High School, denounced “progressive education” during a Parents’ Day program, it triggered a dramatic chain of events that led to school closures, public protests, lawsuits, and Olivier’s dismissal. Opposing Superintendent Curry Couvillion and Principal W.K. Baillio, Olivier argued that academic standards were being eroded in favor of leniency. The controversy fractured the local community, drew in the Catholic Church, and exposed deep divisions over the purpose and methods of public education in mid-century America. The conflict escalated through heated school board meetings and courtroom battles, culminating in Olivier’s firing and eventual legal settlement. This presentation revisits the episode not only as a local power struggle, but as a revealing case study in how national debates over pedagogy, discipline, and authority played out at the grassroots level. It also explores how memory of the event was later erased, despite its lasting impact on the region’s educational landscape.

Benjamin Forkner, Northwestern State University

“What can the ‘no sabo kids’ learn from the Louisiana French experience?”

Recently, U.S. Hispanics started to question the importance of speaking Spanish as part of a core component of their cultural identity. Is the ability to speak a given language essential to understand and be part of a cultural community? The history of French in Louisiana offers a unique perspective to answer this question and provide guidance to a community that seeks to preserve their traditions and culture while slowly but surely losing their linguistic heritage. Until the early 1900’s, more than a century after the Louisiana Purchase, French was still the de facto language for Acadian settlers and Creoles and Louisiana was in effect a bilingual state. In 1916, however, the State Board of Education put an end to the use of French in public schools, and in 1921, the Louisiana State legislature effectively abolished French by proclaiming English as the

exclusive public-school language. Following decades of neglect, political leaders from French speaking regions, realizing that the French language was rapidly disappearing, initiated legislative actions to maintain French as a cornerstone of Cajun culture. However, it took several decades to implement measures to bring French back to Louisiana. While there are still challenges to bring French back to prominence in Louisiana, and, though French faces an uncertain future, new tools are now available to help and support more traditional structures like CODOFIL and Alliance Française.

Derek Foster, Upper Iowa University, Alexandria

“‘The ineffaceable curse of Cain’: A [Re]Evaluation of Sensational Melodrama in Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon*”

The Irish playwright Dion Boucicault arrived in New Orleans in 1855 and leased the Varieties Theatre for three months; when it was up, he returned to New York. Boucicault did not realize at the time that his sojourn in Louisiana’s largest city would produce what critics now consider the first play to explore the lives of America’s enslaved population.

Historically, the question of slavery was at the forefront of politics. Locally, Louisiana dealt with the 1859 election of Thomas Overton Moore as governor. Nationally, following on the heels of the Dred Scott decision, Republicans gained momentum against slavery, and Louisiana became increasingly open to secession. In addition, fueled by such events as the upcoming 1860 presidential election, Boucicault took advantage of the opportunity—though purely for profit at the time—and, in 1859, wrote and produced a controversial play that eventually ranked second only to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* among antebellum audiences.

Today, as in nineteenth-century America, at the heart of *good* theatre lies the conflict between two opposing sides—conflict imbued with a moral background. Generally, in his work, Boucicault employs exaggerated emotions and clear moral distinctions between good and evil. While *The Octoroon* continues in that trope, the playwright focuses on both suspense and spectacle, rather than on character development. In the past twenty years there has been a resurgence in Boucicault criticism, often appraising the play within a twenty-first century sensibility. What results, though, is a plot that emphasizes suspense and excitement at the unfortunate expense of both depth and realism. However, even if readers were to question the validity of the sensational trope, *The Octoroon* remains a powerful social commentary, still fascinating and evoking emotional responses as it did in 1859.

Marcy M. Frantom, Independent Researcher

“Wide-ranging Research Interests of Archaeologist Robert W. Neuman, author of *An Introduction to Louisiana Archaeology* (1984)”

Robert W. Neuman’s wife, Dr. Kathleen Byrd, former Louisiana State Archaeologist and Head of Social Sciences at NSU, is donating a collection of Neuman’s files for researcher interest to Donna Baker, University Archivist and Records Officer at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center in the Watson Memorial Library at Northwestern State University.

The files contain Neuman's presentation notes, letters, and writings on topics of the southwestern United States, but we would like to highlight a few of his Louisiana subjects to give researchers a taste of his wit, range, and contribution to the study of archaeology in our State.

"Persimmon Notes" includes a study of literature written on the use of persimmons by Native Americans at the time of his study. Neuman's work also covers the use of curative plants, foods made of persimmons including beer and bread, Indian agriculture in well-populated areas, and a bibliography of plant remains in American archaeology.

"A Perforated, Spatulate Stone Celt from Louisiana" was written for the 1995 *Louisiana Archaeology* issue no. 18 in honor of William G. Haag. This celt was collected at the swamp of Lake Penchant in Terrebonne Parish by pioneer avocational archaeologist, Randolph A. Bazet. It was one of the few Southeastern Ceremonial Complex artifacts found in Louisiana and reveals aboriginal trade of artistic artifacts.

"Split Cane Items in Louisiana: A View from Archaeology and Ethnology" is included in the 1995 book *The Work of Tribal Hands: Southeastern Indian Split Cane Basketry*, edited by Dayna Lee and Hiram "Pete" Gregory. This work illustrates Neuman's life-long interest in uplifting the work of women anthropologists who don't easily get recognition for their accomplishments. In the essay Neuman features the research of Gene Weltfish, a Boasian anthropologist.

Bernard Gallagher, Louisiana State University of Alexandria

"Empty Spaces"

Ernest Rutherford, in his famous gold foil experiment, discovered that all matter is mostly empty space. My poems, set in or about Louisiana, investigate a kind of emotional corollary. That is, they explore the empty spaces that people often sense when they discover in their moments of most intense feeling and greatest intimacy that love is comprised mostly of empty space and that we are unable to bridge the space that lies between love and the tangible physical body, which is ironically composed mostly of space as well.

Kathryn Gentry, Northwestern State University

"Truvy's Beauty Salon: A 'Classroom' of Life Experiences and Cultural Exchanges in Robert Harling's *Steel Magnolias*"

The town of Natchitoches, Louisiana is the setting for Robert Harling's *Steel Magnolias*, which serves as a cultural lens for assessing informal education. The play shows how an informal education can occur naturally through the sharing of personal experiences. Truvy's beauty salon is a "classroom" where the women's relationships, health challenges, and misfortunes are front and center. Many rural communities in Louisiana sustain their cultural identities through multigenerational dialogue in shared spaces. The women show how education and cultural exchanges occur outside regular classrooms through the dissemination of life skills and values that demonstrate how education and culture integrate in Louisiana's social structure.

Chris Gilson, Northwestern State University

“‘Music and Light are Around Me’: Paul Green and the Natchitoches Symphonic Drama, *Louisiana Cavalier*”

In 2026, the United States will celebrate the 250th anniversary of its founding. America250, as the semiquincentennial is known, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the last major anniversary celebration—the 1976 United States Bicentennial. Louisiana cities marked the occasion with fireworks, festivals, parades, and time capsules. In Natchitoches, 1976 was remarkable for another unique celebration of history, the inaugural season of Paul Green’s *Louisiana Cavalier*, a symphonic drama based on the life and times of French explorer Louis Juchereau de St. Denis.

Celebrated as the founder of Natchitoches, St. Denis has been the subject of relatively few creative works. *Louisiana Cavalier* was a rare exception. Born in 1894, Paul Green was a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright whose early works celebrated the people of North Carolina while challenging the morality of segregation. Later, he would be credited with developing an entirely new form of theatre—the symphonic drama, for which he was awarded North Carolina’s highest citizen honor.

This presentation explores *Louisiana Cavalier* as an intersection of history, art, and popular culture. It traces the play’s development and production during the Bicentennial, its memory in North Louisiana, and the unique era of symphonic drama that it represented. It offers a glimpse of a fleeting moment when young actors and actresses could sing on the bluffs of Grand Ecore, “Music and light are around me.”

Dr. Katrina Jordan, Northwestern State University

Dr. Michelle Fazio-Brunson, Northwestern State University

Dr. April Giddens, Northwestern State University

Dr. Debra Jo Hailey, Northwestern State University

“The Ready Start Natchitoches Network: Dreaming of a Bright Future for Children and Their Families in Louisiana”

The Natchitoches Parish Early Childhood Network is a collaborative consortium of Early Childhood Programs committed to delivering high-quality care and education for children from birth to four years of age. This network encompasses six Public Pre-K Programs, one Head Start program, two Early Head Start Programs, seven Type III Licensed Child Care Centers, and one Home-Based Child Care Provider. Effective collaboration is vital for our success and for promoting community awareness regarding the significance of early care and education. Our efforts are supported by a diverse range of community partners, including Early Steps, the Orchard Foundation, the Natchitoches Area Chamber of Commerce, the A+ Coalition, NSU

Child and Family Network, CASA of Natchitoches, Families Helping Families, Tulane Mental Health Consultation, the Nurse-Family Partnership, Northwestern State University's Early Childhood Department, the Women's Resource Center, and various local businesses and health program.

The Ready Start Networks function as an Advisory Board for the Natchitoches Parish Early Childhood Network. Established in 2019, Ready Start Natchitoches Network comprises a diverse assembly of committed local community stakeholders, including business leaders, financial institutions, and city representatives. RSN is dedicated to fostering a sustainable ecosystem for early childhood education that not only addresses immediate challenges but also supports the long-term developmental outcomes for children and families. By emphasizing high-quality standards and community engagement, we strive to educate and empower both families and providers, thereby reinforcing our advocacy for funding capabilities (Ready, Set, Learn, 2025). This presentation will explain how the RSN works in Natchitoches. The presenters will share stories about how families are impacted by this vital service to our community and how participants can make the difference in the lives of children in Louisiana.

Lisa A. Kirby, Collin College

“The Drama of Displacement: *The Floating World* and Geographical Trauma in Post-Katrina New Orleans”

According to Margaret Wilkerson Sexton of *The New York Times*, C. Morgan Babst's novel *The Floating World* (2017) offers an “elegy for Post-Katrina New Orleans.” Told from multiple perspectives within a New Orleans family in the aftermath of Katrina, the novel examines a variety of issues related to trauma, race, class, identity, and community. Babst crafts a deeply personal narrative by exploring the emotional, cultural, and economic fallout of Hurricane Katrina through the Boisdoré family. In doing so, she writes not just the story of this working-class family, but the story of New Orleans itself.

As the 20th anniversary of Katrina nears, Babst's novel offers a unique opportunity to examine the complicated aftermath of the storm, both geographically and emotionally. This presentation argues that the novel offers a powerful narrative of trauma, both personal and collective, while foregrounding the intersection of race, class, and displacement in post-Katrina New Orleans. While the hurricane is the traumatic event at the heart of this novel, there are multiple other traumas at work, many the result of the complicated history of race and class in New Orleans itself. Babst's novel represents not just the surging floodwaters, but a society in flux, a world trying to stay afloat emotionally and culturally. As such, *The Floating World* is both intimate and epic, capturing a community's identity in crisis and transformation.

Works Cited

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Pamela Elaine Lockridge, Independent Scholar

“The Rougarou Festival as a Means to Mass Communicating the Current Drama in Louisiana Courts for Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse”

This paper highlights the Louisiana folklore swamp creature, the Rougarou, and his symbolic character. His festival venue is utilized to spread news that is a powerful, informative drama playing out in Louisiana courts for Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (ASCSA).

Oftentimes, the folklore community uses tales like the Rougarou to communicate important information metaphorically to disseminate local and state news. The literature expounds on the problem of trying to manifest such delicate and important news, such as justice for ASCSA in a most efficient way through the avenue of festival mass communications. Informing the public of new laws enacted to give redress to victims of ASCSA is most important for two significant reasons. Firstly, Louisiana law changes allow for no more Statute of Limitations in Louisiana for any child abused, especially child sexual abuse going forward from June 21, 2025. Secondly, originally any ASCSA could bring a case against their perpetrator/s only within the three-year window until 2024. These laws were signed by the Louisiana Governor into law June 2021. The Louisiana legislature then extended the three-year look back laws from 2024 to 2027, because an organization fought to have the three-year look back window declared by the Louisiana Supreme Court as unconstitutional. However, the Louisiana high court declared the three-year look back window a constitutional law. The Rougarou Festival in Houma, Louisiana on October 17-19, 2025 will be a place of mass communication for myself as a vendor. I will share pamphlets with the Louisiana court change information. My autoethnographic experience will be the method used to highlight past endeavors of mass communicating information to the public through attending two Louisiana book festivals. Finally, because of a paucity of research, there is room for future studies on mass communication for ASCSA victims and public information as well.

James MacDonald, Northwestern State University

“An Author of Good Fortune: Ruth Cross and the Struggles of St. Denis”

Often considered the founder of Natchitoches, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis garners little attention in historical literature. In fact, the only biography of note on the Frenchman is Ross Phares's *Cavalier in the Wilderness* published in 1952. The fascinating life and exploits St. Denis have, however, been the subject of several fictional treatments, perhaps the most prominent being Ruth Cross's *Soldier of Good Fortune* (1936). A writer of note at the time, Cross's earlier book *The Golden Cocoon* was adapted into a successful Warner Brothers movie.

In her effort to write a historically accurate novelization of St. Denis, Cross became frustrated with the endeavor. Writing to Cammie Henry in 1933 she admitted “I’m so tired of it – it wasn’t my type anyhow.” Towards the end of her life, after she moved to Winn Parish, Cross donated her papers to the archives at Northwestern State University.

The purpose of this paper will be to evaluate *Soldier* from a historical perspective and present Cross's process as she struggled with her subject and the difficulty of writing an accurate historical novel.

Bruce R. Magee, Louisiana Tech University

Stephen Payne, Independent Scholar

“Law and Disorder in *Liberty in Louisiana*”

The LIBERTY we cherish consists in the laws
which secure to us the enjoyment of all our natural and
justly acquired advantages. —Workman

Liberty in Louisiana by James Workman is the oldest known extant play about Louisiana. Workman wrote the play in 1803 with the goal of supporting the impending Louisiana Purchase. This was Workman’s sole venture in writing drama; he mostly wrote political essays. This time, he thought he could reach a wider audience with a play, but he still had a political objective. His goal was to demonstrate the superior legal system of the United States, which would free Louisiana from the tyranny of the Old World and replace it with the New World’s Republic of Freedom. Workman had a ready theme to use in his play—the Black Legend of Spanish Law. Spanish law was denigrated by other European countries. Its Civil Law, modelled on old Roman Law, had the best reputation, but it was slow, secret, incredibly complex, and open to corruption. The Criminal Law was markedly worse in the popular imagination. It was not seen as ancient Roman but as excessively Medieval and barbaric. Spain used several forms of capital punishment, mutilation and other corporal punishments, and forced labor. Worst of all was Canon Law—the infamous Spanish Inquisition. The corrupt judge Don Bertoldo embodies this old, corrupt systems that the Americans end.

Michael S. Martin, Nicholls State University

“‘The Center of the Land’: Southeastern Native American Mythology, Intra-Tribal Confederacy, and Ethnography in the Nineteenth Century”

This project attempts a comparative study of place-names and spatial coordinates in tribal mythology from Cherokee, Alabama, Choctaw (La), Kosati (La), Natchez (La), and Chitimacha (La) orature, arguing both that a shared portrayal of place and dimensions is evident in each and that the Cherokee versions of tribal stories have the most developed epistemology of the group. For example, in both the “Origin of the Pleiades and the Pine” (Cherokee) and “The Pleiades” (Kosati), directional markers or larger, Indigenous spatial arrangements, are somewhat lacking; the focus instead is on the origin of the stars or their human-like characteristics. In the Yuchi creation story and other tales, the mythology features both allegorical/personified versions of these celestial bodies, complete with their dialogue, as if they were characters in a fictional sketch. Secondly, the sun and moon are included, as with other Southeastern origin stories, as having a central role in the creation story of multiple tribes; the celestial bodies are envisioned as catalysts for the creation of the cosmos and also seem to exist outside of, or beyond, time. I argue that the Alabama stories and other, contemporary Southeastern orature also reveal an Indigenous system of knowledge that is linked to 19th-century events. These events may be the reshapings and new confederacies of tribal affiliation, or purposeful contention with tribal cultural memory after the forced removals of the 1830s -1850s, similar to the Cherokee “Local Legend” stories.

But sky-based worlds and Indigenous orderings of the cosmos also represent a form of tribal sovereignty and selfhood. The talk concludes by suggesting that the larger, shared epistemology that informs these stories is only gleaned through these textual fragments, though cultural context and oral histories passed on by tribal elders surely help preserve such a tradition.

Sarah McFarland, Northwestern State University

Michael S. Martin, University of Louisiana-Lafayette

Charles Pellegrin, Northwestern State University

Mark Melder, Northwestern State University

“New Scholarship on the Far-Right in Louisiana in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: A Panel Discussion”

Despite Louisiana’s rich political history, its dalliance with far-right organizations has created significant drama in the Pelican State’s modern narrative. As it seems that Louisiana, and the United States in general, has moved politically toward the right during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, historians and social scientists have begun analyzing this phenomenon and related organizations during this era in an effort to explain contemporary politics and society. Focusing on Louisiana, this informal panel discussion will elaborate on the discussants’ new research and scholarship on the Ku Klux Klan, the Citizens’ Councils and other similar groups involved in massive resistance, and Christian Nationalist and related organizations.

Each of the three participants will have 15-20 minutes to make a brief presentation on their new research, which will be followed by discussion with, and questions from, the audience. The participants are listed below:

Sarah McFarland, Northwestern State University, will serve as session chair.

Michael Martin, University of Louisiana-Lafayette, will speak on his research on the Ku Klux Klan in Louisiana in the 1920s.

Charles Pellegrin, Northwestern State University, will speak on his research involving the Association of Citizens’ Councils of Louisiana and other organizations involved in massive resistance in the 1950s and 1960s.

Mark Melder, Northwestern State University, will discuss the rise of Christian Nationalist and similar groups in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Conan Mills, Louisiana State University

“An Archaeological Field School at the Louisiana Seminary of Learning and Military Academy (16RA49): Digging into Louisiana’s Early Higher Education”

The Louisiana Seminary of Learning and Military Academy (Old Louisiana State University Site [LSU]) (16RA49) was Louisiana's first serious effort in public higher education in the state. In 1855, the state requested bids for the construction of the school, which would be located in Rapides Parish, largely because of the efforts of George Mason Graham. Alexander Thompson Wood designed the building in the Gothic Revival style and the state requested quotes from contractors to produce 1.5 million bricks and to construct the building. The Seminary opened in 1860 with William Tecumseh Sherman as president and aimed for a high standard of scholarship and military discipline. However, the Civil War forced its closure in 1861. Post-war, the seminary struggled financially during the reconstruction era, though original faculty member David F. Boyd returned to lead efforts to rebuild. Ultimately, the Seminary burned down on October 15, 1869.

The Seminary site is a staple in the history of Pineville, Louisiana. Despite being on the National Register of Historic Places since 1973, no meaningful archaeological investigation has ever taken place on the site. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, a research design was developed to study the site. In the summer of 2025, an archaeological field school was organized as part of a master's thesis research project and, over the course of five weeks, students from LSU took part in excavations learning the basics of archaeological field techniques while working on an active research project. These excavations shed light on Louisiana's foray into higher education, student life, and previously unknown architectural elements of the Seminary.

Robin G. Parson, Oral Historian / Cultural Ambassador & Choreographer

“Creole Folk Dance and the Evolution of ‘Jass to Jazz’ Dance”

In 1992 while doing research into the origins of Jazz Dance, Dr. Bruce Raeburn, curator of the Tulane University Hogans Jazz Archive, insisted that I meet a gentleman by the name of Eddie Edwards, President of the local Louis Armstrong Foundation, Inc. At that point I had never met Mr. Edwards, nor did I know of the Louis Armstrong Foundation, Inc, but upon meeting Mr. Edwards soon discovered that not only was he a musician and artist but also a former writer for Fox Studios in Hollywood who had worked alongside Harold Baptiste, musical director for the *Sonny & Cher Show*. Mr. Edwards was born in a small African village along the Old German Coast in St. John the Baptist Parish named Woodville.

This introduction would create a friendship and mentorship that would last better than 25 years. It would be Mr. Edwards who would groom me as a Cultural Ambassador for the Louis Armstrong Foundation, Inc. Dance Studies program. The Dance Studies program allowed me the opportunity to research and create a tour throughout Louisiana school systems that offered Creole folk dance and New Orleans jazz dance presentations.

Since that point of contact with Mr. Eddie Edwards, I have continued researching Creole folk dance and the evolution of “Jass to Jazz” within the city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana.

Kent W. Peacock, Northwestern State University

“Theatrical Performance and Spaces as Civic Pride, Controversy, and Progress in Turn of the 20th Century Natchitoches, Louisiana”

The history of the theater and public amusements in Louisiana typically fixates on the urban mecca of New Orleans or the writers who called the state home or found inspiration during their visits there. Yet theatrical amusements and spaces had become a staple of most Louisiana towns by the early 20th century. Natchitoches was no exception, and this paper begins to reconstruct the history of live performance and built performance spaces in Natchitoches during the decades after the US Civil War that culminated in the construction of a new performance venue, the AMUZ-U Theatre (later the Don Theatre), in 1916. For Natchitoches a performance venue like an opera house or a theater was not just a measure of economic success but a signifier of community values that included a belief in the arts as part of what made good citizens and the need for spaces that brought people together. While never without conflict or contradictions, it could also indicate that towns like Natchitoches throughout the American South were becoming part of a New South that was aligning and interconnected with the political and cultural trends of the other regions of the United States.

Robert C. Petersen, Middle Tennessee State University

“‘A human medley’ in New Orleans’: Joseph Holt Ingraham’s *The South-West by a Yankee* (1835)”

One piece of the puzzle that is the transatlantic connection among Africa, Europe, and the emerging United States, perhaps more than one piece, is the cultural mixture that could be found in New Orleans just a few decades subsequent to its purchase from Napoleon in 1803. Joseph Holt Ingraham’s *The South-West by a Yankee* (1835) is both a travel narrative, detailing a sea journey from Portland, Maine to New Orleans and then a trip up the Mississippi to Natchez, and the testimony of a New Englander settling as a teacher and later an Episcopal clergyman in New Orleans at the time the town was becoming a major port for the shipment of cotton to the northeast and Europe. Originally published as articles in the *Natchez Courier* between 1833 and 1835, the book, printed in two volumes by Harper & Brothers in New York, characterizes the “human medley” Ingraham finds there as simply exotic. In time, however, he comes to see New Orleans’s people, whether Spanish, French, or African in origin as integral to the social and economic fabric of life in and around the city and the source of a multicultural identity to be seen as American.

Allison Shaver, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

“Trauma and Transformation: *My Louisiana Sky*’s Coming-of-Age Narrative”

If an academic were asked to name a Louisiana work, Kimberly Willis Holt’s 1998 book *My Louisiana Sky* would likely not be the first title they think of. Nevertheless, while this novel has received little scholarly attention, it has received significant popular attention after being made into a Hollywood film in 2001. This presentation aims to fill a literary research gap by exploring how this book offers insight into trauma specific to the American South and, in particular, Louisiana. I argue that trauma is, in many ways, a hallmark feature of this novel, because its plot line centers on a child gradually recognizing how trauma has led to divisions within both her culture and her family. Set in

1950s Louisiana, *My Louisiana Sky*'s narrator, Tiger Ann Parker, gradually comes to recognize how cultural trauma, molded by Jim Crow laws, has divided her community. Her mother's intellectual disability exposes the family to ableist attitudes, thus connecting Tiger's personal pain about her mother's condition to broader marginalization. Still, rather than solely acting as a debilitating force, trauma instead acts as a site for transformation. It is framed as a catalyst that allows Tiger to develop empathy and gain cultural insight. By channeling her story through the watchful eyes of a child, Holt can address complex and deep-rooted Louisiana social issues through a filter of innocence instead of the weary eyes of disillusioned adults. Her story cements its place among other coming-of-age narratives by emphasizing this fraught relationship between a child and her society.

Sumor Ziva Sheppard, Prairie View A&M University

“A Discovery of Penance: Reverberations of Spanish Racialization and Louisianans as Powerful Agents of Change in Harkness’ *All Souls* Series”

In Deborah Harkness’ *All Souls* fantasy series, the pursuit of power and knowledge-as-power drives this peculiar re-telling of Loving vs. Virginia where the ultimate arbiter of the case’s merit is not the Hon. Judge Warren, but rather a disenfranchised, underestimated, stoic, multiracial family of Louisiana vampires. Societal change for the creatures of *All Souls* and the validation of the noble Diana and Matthew’s right to life and family lie in their hands. It is they who weigh the sincerity of the protagonists’ plans and if their quest to change the world of creatures will move forward. Although the presence of the multiracial and multiethnic Louisiana vampire family is brief (their fictional beginnings described as the disgraceful blip of a naive and rebellious youth), this seemingly powerless, unrecognized family functions as the judges of the moral development of Matthew, the merit of his plan, and if he has finally escaped from one of the most successful exports of medieval Spain: the modern concept of race and its adherent racism. In their deliberation of the facts, judgement, and sentence of penance, the Louisiana vampire family of *All Souls* embodies southeast Louisiana’s historically underestimated, powerful influence on national and global social movements.

Gene Slepov, College of Staten Island, City University of New York

“The Drama of Place in Lower Plaquemines in E.P. O’Donnell’s *The Great Big Doorstep*”

E.P. O’Donnell’s 1939 novel *The Great Big Doorstep* has endured in the cultural imagination largely thanks to a stage adaptation by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett that is still regularly performed in Louisiana theaters. More recently, a 2015 edition of the book published by LSU Press has the potential to bring this “Depression-era comic masterpiece” to wider audiences. The novel’s suitability for the stage lies in its expressive dialogue and in its unity of place where setting is confined to a single, sharply defined location. Indeed, the novel is grounded in a highly particularized corner of the world—in south Plaquemines Parish—in a setting so singular that it could not be conflated with any other. The exuberant Crochet family occupies a ramshackle stilt-cabin on the river batture, with the levee rising behind them. From the fragility of their daily relationship with the environment and through cunning adaptation strategies emerges a richly textured world of circumstantial detail, a colorful depiction of a region, culminating in a vivid and dramatic sense of place.

In this presentation I would like to analyze such place relations via three loci of significance: the

house, the region, and the larger world. Corresponding to each domain I want to explore the following questions: How do we conceptualize the difference between a shelter and a home? In what ways is the Mississippi River imagined by those whose daily lives are intimately bound to it? How are the rhythms of local life here entwined with global currents?

Dean Sinclair, Northwestern State University

“The Tip of the Spear: Camp Sabine and the Beginnings of Manifest Destiny”

In Spring 1806 Spanish troops crossed the Sabine River to occupy the presidio at Los Adaes and to position troops in the Bayou Pierre community. President Thomas Jefferson responded, dispatching General James Wilkinson to the frontier. Wilkinson did not arrive at Natchitoches until October, by which time the Spanish forces had withdrawn across the Sabine. Though the situation had calmed, Wilkinson pushed his force to the west, taking up a position three miles east of the Sabine River on the old Camino Real. Wilkinson faced a dilemma. The general was not only a paid agent of the Spanish government but also was engaged in a conspiracy with former vice president Aaron Burr. Wilkinson sought to end the border issue with the Spanish and make his way to New Orleans to capture Burr. From his camp on the Sabine, Wilkinson negotiated the Neutral Ground agreement which kept the Spanish west of the Sabine and the Americans east of the Rio Hondo, creating a “no man’s land.” The Neutral Strip became a haven for bandits, squatters, and runaway slaves. The site used by Wilkinson also became a mustering place for filibusters looking to seize control of Texas in the years before the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1821 established the boundary with Mexico. In 1835 the site was occupied by General Edmund Pendleton Gaines and named Camp Sabine as the United States sought to assert itself in the conflict in Texas. Camp Sabine represents the tip of the spear of Manifest Destiny, first used in 1806, then throughout the neutral zone period and afterwards, as the United States sought to expand its empire to the west.

Adelaide Soileau, ARGO Lab and NCPTT

“Teaching Community Youth to Document their History and the Built Environment Using Remote Systems”

Historical preservation plays a vital role in education, as it allows us to learn about parts of history that could become forgotten otherwise. This is especially important in historically underrepresented communities/areas that aren’t documented as well as others. To preserve more of Natchitoches’s history, the ARGO Lab and the NCPTT created a program for local students to digitally document historical buildings while also learning about drone technology and preservation.

Over the past two summers, the 3D Digital Field School has spanned the course of two weeks, split equally between data collection and processing. Each year four historical buildings have been documented, specifically buildings outside of the Natchitoches Historic District. Many of these buildings were beyond repair, so it was important to preserve them in a different way. Our team, including our student workers, used drone photography to build 3D models of each building through a process known as Structure from Motion (SfM) photogrammetry.

For each building, our students used a drone (DJI Mavic Enterprise 2) to capture high-resolution geotagged photographs. Through photogrammetry processing software (Agisoft Metashape Pro) that identifies common points in a series of photographs, our students built geospatially accurate 3D reconstructions. Students also made interactive virtual tours of some buildings using a camera that captures 360-degree lidar scans (Matterport Pro 3). The students also conducted interviews with community members and/or the building owners.

The results of our work were put into a free, online “storymap” that shows the location, history, and models of each site. Every year students will update the webpage so that it serves as an extended map of Natchitoches’s Historic District that offers a look into the lesser-known histories of this city.

Maxwell L. Turner, Singer-Songwriter

“Big Max Turner: The Country Blues of Natchitoches”

Max Turner, of Native Hawaiian descent, has been singing and writing songs for over 60 years. Previously performing in the Texas Austin and San Antonio areas, he sang and played on stage with Freddy Fender, B.B. King, Johnny and Edgar Winter, and Stevie Ray Vaughn, among others. In Louisiana, he played at festivals and events including the Natchitoches-NSU Folk Festival, Sykes-Wolf Creek Festival, Dry Prong Festival, Arcadia Jam, Chicken Festival (Dubach), and Lake Claiborne, among others. He writes songs in country, blues, and rock genres. Max will play five originals including “Meet Me Down on Front Street,” custom written for the Natchitoches Tricentennial CD recording which included a performance featuring blues harmonica man Ed Huey (not appearing). “Play That Fiddle Music, Buzz” was written for Cloutierville fiddle all-star Buzz Salard and former Natchitoches Parish Sheriff Boyd Durr. “Biscuit-eating Man” highlights a folk poem on the prevailing form of sweetener around farmhouse tables in the Depression. A traditional 12-bar blues song, “Baby Doll Blues,” hits all the key elements of blues songs including cars, loneliness, and lost money. Finally, “Walk You to the End of the Road” is inspired by bluegrass jam buddies and is often requested at memorial services.

Anna Kathryn Vaughn, Northwestern State University

“A Night at the Theater: Community Theaters in Louisiana”

I saw my first play, *South Pacific*, when I was about ten years old. It was not in New York on Broadway. Volunteer actors from the Central Louisiana area put on the production of Rogers and Hammerstein’s award-winning musical about World War II on the Pacific. Two decades later, the same City Park Players produced the musical again. Different volunteer actors, but same quality performance. The theater troupe continues to produce high quality productions.

Northwest Louisiana area residents have long enjoyed community through Shreveport Little Theater. The troupe of volunteer actors dates to pre-World War II producing quality

performances. Founded in 1922, Shreveport Little Theater continues to entertain the northwest region of Louisiana, producing a variety of comedies, dramas, and musicals.

BackAlley Theater in Grand Cane, just south of Shreveport, puts on impressive shows every year. Founded in 2000, the volunteer actors and supporting staff have produced musicals, such as *The Sound of Music*, which featured a stage design and props as simple as painting a backdrop of the Swiss Alps.

The purpose of this presentation explores the community theater in Louisiana that has enjoyed a long history and those which are relatively young. The focus is the value these little theaters bring to communities whose residents might not otherwise be able to enjoy such performances by their friends and neighbors whose hidden talents come alive when they step on the stage. Included in the research are interviews with artistic directors, volunteer actors, and a local playwright who started in community theater.

Adrienne Vivian, Seminole State College of Florida

“Theater and Drama in Two New Orleans Stories”

Joanni Questy’s “Monsieur Paul” (1867) and Sidonie de La Houssaye’s “Octavia la quarteronne” (1894) both include characters who, early on in the stories, go to the theater. In each text, theater attendance serves as a catalyst for chance encounters between characters and prompts the action that follows. I intend to consider the role of the theater within the context of the stories, how aspects of the characters’ identities are concealed and revealed, and the ways that the stories’ plots incorporate drama, both through theater and vivid emotions and conflicts.

Gabriele A. Williams, National Center for Preservation Technology and Training / Cane River National Heritage Area

“The Power of the Past: How Underrepresented Communities’ Stories Can Help Us Progress Forward”

The past is incredibly powerful. It serves as a reminder of how far we have come and as a warning of what can happen if we do not continue to do the hard work of educating ourselves and others around us. When marginalized communities are given the opportunity to tell their history, they can control the narrative surrounding them and change it, if necessary. Their voice is returned to them, amplified, and allows the group to define itself on its terms. It is important to acknowledge the history of marginalized communities because when the past is forgotten, we cannot give credit to the individuals who persevered against adversity to give a better life to those who would come after them. Forgetting the past or, worse—actively suppressing it—is an act of violence against groups whose voices have been ignored or silenced. This presentation will discuss how the use of zines can help give that voice. It will focus specifically on Black American communities in Louisiana and give an overview of the group’s contributions to the town (Morgan Hotel), cultural artifacts (hot combs), and the town’s attempted reparation to the community (Uncle Jack).