



# Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy

*Kevin Fox Gotham*

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Honorable Mention for the 2008 Robert Park Outstanding Book Award given by the ASA's Community and Urban Sociology Section. Mardi Gras, jazz, voodoo, gumbo, Bourbon Street, the French Quarter all evoke that place that is unlike any other: New Orleans. In *Authentic New Orleans*, Kevin Fox Gotham explains how New Orleans became a tourist town, a spectacular locale known as much for its excesses as for its quirky Southern charm. Gotham begins in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina amid the whirlwind of speculation about the rebuilding of the city and the dread of outsiders wiping New Orleans clean of the grit that made it great. He continues with the origins of Carnival and the Mardi Gras celebration in the nineteenth century, showing how, through careful planning and promotion, the city constructed itself as a major tourist attraction. By examining various image-building campaigns and promotional strategies to disseminate a palatable image of New Orleans on a national scale, Gotham ultimately establishes New Orleans as one of the originators of the mass tourism industry which linked leisure to travel, promoted international expositions, and developed the concept of pleasure travel. Gotham shows how New Orleans was able to become one of the most popular tourist attractions in the United States, especially through the transformation of Mardi Gras into a national, even international, event. All the while, Gotham is concerned with showing the difference between tourism from above and tourism from below—that is, how New Orleans' distinctiveness is both maximized, some might say exploited, to serve the global economy of tourism as well as how local groups and individuals use tourism to preserve and anchor longstanding communal traditions.

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