

*Ain't There, No More:
Louisiana's
Disappearing Coastal
Plain*

By

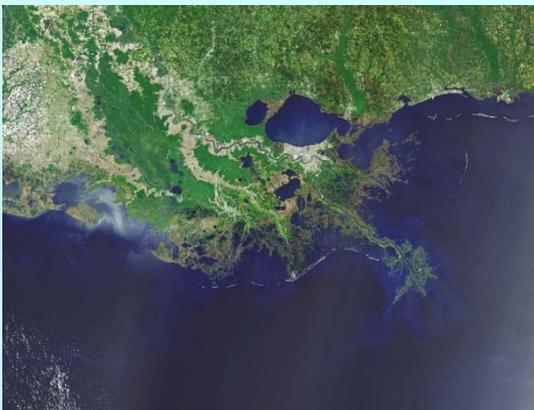
Carl A. Brasseaux and Donald W. Davis

Thursday, October 5, 2017

MUB Theater 1

1 – 2 pm

Authors Carl and Don are not only a wealth of information, but tremendous (and energetic) story tellers.



OVERVIEW: In 1970, a group of LSU scientists and graduate students published the first comprehensive study of the Mississippi delta's eroding landscape. Their alarming findings—that the region's historic rate of loss was 16.53 miles²/mile—provided the impetus for a wide array of bio-physical studies. Each subsequent investigation has refined the ratio of land to water and reinforced the conclusion that one of the world's most important deltas is disappearing. In fact, recent studies have determined that coastal erosion has claimed a surface area about the size of Delaware since 1930.

In their rush to determine the extent of land loss, scientists examining Louisiana's coastal lowlands have traditionally been focused almost exclusively upon environmental change's impact on local flora and fauna. In contrast to the significant corpus of books, monographs, documentary films, and "grey" publications on the coastal zone's terrestrial, aquatic, and avian species, little has been written about the increasingly vulnerable human communities in the coastal areas. Tenacious and resilient, these coastal residents, living on the bleeding edge of global environmental change, are the descendants of pioneers who shaped the region's landscape over the past 300 years.

Their long tenure in the coastal marshes has come at the cost of thousands of lives and immense human suffering. Now, confronted with severe and extensive coastal erosion, as well as rising ocean levels, temperatures, and acidification – exacerbated by pollution and coastal subsidence – state, federal, corporate, and private agencies have attempted to address these problems through massive expenditures earmarked for engineering projects and scientific research. Very little money is devoted to human dimensions. As a result, policy makers are formulating strategies for communities they have never visited and literally know next to nothing about, and, not surprisingly, their policies have not been favorably received by the societies they directly impact. Moreover, the efforts to combat land loss will be extremely expensive; even so, the alternative will be still more costly, as the Gulf's waters move north to threaten the nation's most critical energy infrastructure.

Ain't There, No More, the inaugural volume of the new Third Coast Series published by the University Press of Mississippi, addresses many of the cultural and economic issues that bureaucrats and scientists have routinely ignored. The book's narrative addresses these issues through the eyes of a cultural geographer and a social historian. In examining the forgotten human landscapes, the authors examine the emergence and evolution of surprisingly large and ethnically diverse population, while focusing on the environmental and human factors that placed coastal residents at risk of literally washing away.

From the earliest historical times, Louisiana's marshes have appealed to a broad cross-section of ethnic groups. Still the coastal lowlands are a landscape in which humans seem tiny and inconsequential. Even so, the diverse assemblage of peoples that moved onto near sea-level marsh sites made a good living off the land. Most of these individuals were "boat-minded" people who were a census taker's nightmare, but are part of the marshlands' human story.

The wetland is a landscape where faiths, culture, races, and ethnic groups coexist and contribute to the wetland's *persona*, as well as to its dynamism, and creativity. In many ways, these settlers/immigrants reinvented the marsh landscape to meet their needs. They were marshdwellers and proud of it. They did not need to explain their modest lifestyle, subsidence economies, reason for being, and *c'est la vie* attitude. To them the marsh was of inestimable value that sustained them and was their home. From isolated sites, to clusters of dwellings on the Cheniers, the region's economic drivers and associated communities could be distinguished and divided into eight categories: agriculture; fishing, trapping; commercial hunting; industrial activity; government service; recreation; and a combination of these elements. Each of these subdivisions were the bases for permanent or transient settlements and will serve as the backbone of a talk on: *Ain't There No More* and how these individuals have survived and prospered for at least 300 years. Consequently, the backdrop to this presentation will be based on several questions. Are individuals, corporations, and governments willing to exhibit the initiative, leadership, vision, and courage necessary to meet unprecedented challenges and place the common good above narrow self-interests? Are they also prepared to commit the financial, physical, and human resources necessary to literally turn the tide and rescue a precious national resource? Or will these beleaguered coastal communities join the ranks of coastal Louisiana businesses, nonrenewable resources, species, and communities that, in local parlance, "ain't dere no more"?