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Worlds of the Dead of New Orleans

LSU Press to Publish The Cemeteries of New Orleans in June 2017

Baton Rouge—In *The Cemeteries of New Orleans*, to be published in June, Peter B. Dedek reveals the origins and evolution of the Crescent City’s world-famous necropolises, exploring both their distinctive architecture and their cultural impact. Spanning centuries, this fascinating body of research takes readers from muddy fields of crude burial markers to extravagantly designed cities of the dead, illuminating a vital and vulnerable piece of New Orleans’s identity.

Where many histories of New Orleans cemeteries have revolved around the famous people buried within them, Dedek focuses on the marble cutters, burial society members, journalists, and tourists who shaped these graveyards into internationally recognizable emblems of the city. In addition to these cultural actors, Dedek’s exploration of cemetery architecture reveals the impact of ancient and medieval grave traditions and styles, the city’s geography, and the arrival of trained European tomb designers, such as the French architect J. N. B. de Pouilly in 1833 and Italian artist and architect Pietro Gualdi in 1851.

As Dedek shows, the nineteenth century was a particularly critical era in the city’s cemetery design. Notably, the cemeteries embodied traditional French and Spanish precedents, until the first garden cemetery—the Metairie Cemetery—was built on the site of an old racetrack in 1872. Like the older walled cemeteries, this iconic venue served as a lavish expression of fraternal and ethnic unity, a backdrop to exuberant social celebrations, and a destination for sightseeing excursions. During this time, cultural and religious customs, such as the celebration of All Saints’ Day and the practice of Voodoo rituals, flourished within the spatial bounds of these resting places. Over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, episodes of neglect and destruction gave rise to groups that aimed to preserve the historic cemeteries of New Orleans—an endeavor that, according to Dedek, is still wanting for resources and political will.

Containing ample primary source material, abundant illustrations, appendices on tomb styles and the history of many of the city’s eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cemeteries, *The Cemeteries of New Orleans* offers a comprehensive and intriguing resource on these fascinating historic sites.

Peter B. Dedek, author of *Historic Preservation for Designers* and *Hip to the Trip: A Cultural History of Route 66*, is associate professor at Texas State University, where he teaches history of design, historic preservation, and architectural history.

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