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

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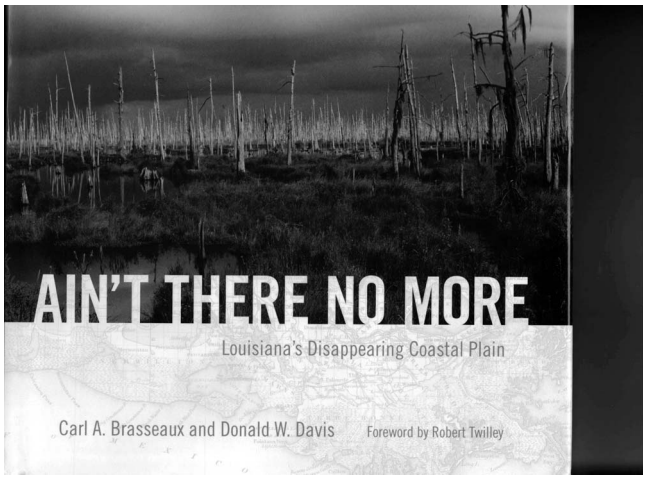
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BOOK REVIEWS

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Brasseaux, C.A. and Davis, D.W., 2017. *Ain't There No More: Louisiana's Disappearing Coastal Plain*. Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 214 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4968-0948-3 (Cloth), $US 30.00.



This book, which is very handsomely produced, was manufactured in Malaysia. This latter fact is mentioned because the book contains many elegant artistic flairs that make it a pleasure to peruse. The page layouts are interesting and enjoyable to behold. The oversize format (25 × 25 cm) makes for easy handling and reading. The book is well illustrated with color maps and photographs throughout. It is gratifying to see that the book is dedicated to Harley "Jess" Walker [1921–2015] (Louisiana State University) and A. David Barry (University of Louisiana at Lafayette), both well-known researchers to the coastal community. These workers who made prodigious contributions to the study of Louisiana's coastal zone are worthy of the honor.

This *tour de force* contains a foreword by Robert Twilley (Executive Director of the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program), as well as a preface, acknowledgments, introduction, afterword, two appendices, a bibliography, and an index. The four chapters are entitled (1) Messin' with Mother Nature, (2) Age of Agricultural Drainage, (3) Industrialization, and (4) Conclusion. The chapter titles themselves tell the story in a nutshell of what has happened to Louisiana's coastal plain. From the perspective of agriculturalists and industrialists, the history of the coastal plain may be perceived as a triumph of humans over Nature. From the other side of the coin, for those concerned with natural environments and ecological well-being, the history is a tragic tale of one environmental insult after another. Sadly, the history of this region echoes what has taken place on many coastal plains of the world. And the story told here presages what is yet to come not only in Louisiana but elsewhere as well. In a word, the history of Louisiana's coastal plain is an accounting of human use and abuse of fragile coastal ecosystems.

The authors are to be congratulated for their lucid presentation of "development" in this coastal region. There are many poignant vignettes that are clearly illustrated in maps and photographs of what happened through time, most notably since the United States gained control of the Mississippi River Valley in the early 1800s. Perhaps not surprisingly, the story of Louisiana's coastal plain is similar to the fate of the Florida Everglades, where both regional and biologically diversified wetlands were ditched, drained, farmed, industrialized, commercialized, urbanized, and militarized in almost every way possible to extract as many resources as possible. As natural ecosystems collapsed one after another, the government introduced myriad programs that were designed for flood control and ecological restoration. When programs failed for lack of understanding natural systems and poor management and implementation, new programs were brought forth to correct the ills of the past. The saga continues with one failed federal program after another, as politicians in Washington believe that throwing money at a problem is the solution. The difficulty is that problem solving requires common sense, scientific understanding of natural and cultural conditions, and technical know-how. All aspects must be appropriate and work in concert. Brasseaux and Davis do a superb job of elucidating the present state of affairs in light of the past. Their recap is not a case of pareidolia because the patterns they see in the historical data are real and tangible in what is seen today on a coastal plain that is in a state of degradation.

Although the abuse of coastal plains is real enough the world over, the case presented here is illuminating in its detailed and clear perception of how things got to be the way they are today. The deteriorating condition of the Louisianan coastal plain is no accident. Its present collapsing biophysical state was induced by human action, and the recount produced in this book may well serve as an exemplar or warning to other societies that are "developing" their own coastal plains. On this account alone the book should be essential reading for those who manage coastal plain environments.

Because of the book's introspective content and value as a historical register of what has taken place to disadvantage on the Louisiana coastal plain, I heartily recommend this exposé to all those professionals who deal with coastal plains. Laypersons will equally find this work to be a notable contribution to their knowledge. The book is good value for money because it was carefully researched and presented in a manner that is clear, concise, and enjoyable to read. It is highly recommended without reservation.

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