university of groningen

umcg

University of Groningen

Swamp Things

Zwiers, Maarten

Published in:
Planetary Hinterlands

DOI:
10.1007/978-3-031-24243-4_9

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2023

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):
Zwiers, M. (2023). Swamp Things: The Wetland Roots of American Authoritarianism. In P. Gupta, S. Nuttall, E. Peeren, & H. Stuit (Eds.), *Planetary Hinterlands: Extraction, Abandonment and Care* (pp. 147-162). (Palgrave Studies in Globalization, Culture and Society (PSGCS)). Palgrave Macmillan Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24243-4_9

Copyright
Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the “Taverne” license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment.

Take-down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): http://www.rug.nl/research/portal. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Download date: 13-09-2026

Check for updates

CHAPTER 9

Swamp Things: The Wetland Roots of American Authoritarianism

Maarten Zwiers

"Drain the swamp." These words were a mantra of Donald J. Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. For Trump and his followers, the swamp represented the political world inside the Beltway of Washington, DC. It is an effective statement, because Washington is located in an actual swamp, on the banks of the Potomac River. During the Reagan years, "drain the swamp" had already become a popular expression among Republicans in particular, indicating their presumed desire to get rid of political corruption in the country's capital, while simultaneously declaring their physical and ideological distance from it. They pictured themselves as the representatives of true Americanism associated with the rural heartland of the United States. Similarly, Trump's allies spoke about "swamp monsters" in their descriptions of officials associated with the political establishment. Through such discourse, the swamp and its monstrous inhabitants

M. Zwiers (✉)
Faculty of Arts/History and American Studies, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands
e-mail: m.zwiers@rug.nl

© The Author(s) 2024

P. Gupta et al. (eds.), *Planetary Hinterlands*, Palgrave Studies in Globalization, Culture and Society,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24243-4_9

emerged as synonyms for the political culture of the federal government and its bureaucracy, in particular liberal and "elitist" Democrats.

Although conservatives in the US have latched on to the "drain the swamp" metaphor to denounce their opponents, their own politics are actually rooted in the swampy hinterlands of the Deep South. These origins can be traced back to the antebellum period, when slavery dominated society in the southern states. Instead of romantic notions of nature, voiced by northern transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and depicted by the Hudson River School, white southern intellectuals often had a completely different idea of their natural surroundings, typified by William Gilmore Simms's sinister 1853 poem "The Edge of the Swamp." For southern authors like Simms, nature was not an idyllic Arcadia, but a boggy dystopia that could only be brought under control through the racialized labor regime of the plantation (Castille 1990, 487); swamps in the American tropics were considered obnoxious obstacles that "compromised the order and productivity of imperial ventures, from explorations to plantations," Monique Allewaert argues (2013, 33).

But the swamps of the South were not the only incubators of US right-wing politics. In his book *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict*, Phil A. Neel devotes an entire chapter to the mobilization of reactionary paramilitary groups in (what he calls) the far hinterland of the United States. Instead of the South, he concentrates on the rural Northwest and arid desert states like Arizona. In these regions, Far-Right organizations such as the Oath Keepers have formed parallel governing structures that offer services no longer provided by official administrative institutions, as neoliberal politics and austerity measures have undermined public funding of these services. So-called Patriot groups see the far hinterland in the West and Northwest as fertile ground to organize a right-wing rebellion against the federal government (Neel 2020, 23–59). Neel indeed offers an effective study of current-day Far-Right organizing in these desolate rural areas, yet foregoes a more historical examination of projects with similar ideologies, located in the southern hinterlands, that were much more successful in offering a template for reactionary politics in the United States.

In contrast with the West, the South has often been relegated to the margins of US culture, an outlier in the traditional American success story. In 1917, Journalist H. L. Mencken famously described the area as the "Sahara of the Bozart … a stupendous region of worn-out farms, shoddy

cities and paralyzed cerebrums" (1977, 157). Slavery, defeat in war, segregation, and rural poverty were some of the more prominent features that set the South apart from the rest of the United States. But in the last few decades, a number of scholars have ventured to deconstruct this "myth of southern exceptionalism" and the South's characterization as un-American. In her recent investigation of the southern states, for instance, historian Imani Perry places the South at the center of U.S. nation-building, exemplified by the subtitle of her book: a journey below the Mason-Dixon to explore *the soul of a nation*.[1] "The consequence of the projection of national sins, and specifically racism, onto one region is a mis-narration of history and American identity," she writes, and the "consequence of truncating the South and relegating it to a backwards corner is a misapprehension of its power in American history" (Perry 2022, xix). For Perry, studying the South and its hinterlands, in particular "how it moves the rest of the country about," exposes the ways US capitalism functions (2022, xix).

What follows is an analysis of the entanglement between oil drilling and white supremacist politics in the Jim Crow South, with a specific focus on the Louisiana hinterlands. This Deep South state was notorious for its entrenched corruption and semi-dictatorial political culture, especially during the reign of Governor Huey "the Kingfish" Long (1893–1935). One of Long's allies was Leander "Judge" Perez, who governed Plaquemines Parish as a segregationist strongman from the 1920s until the late 1960s. Located in the hinterlands of the port city of New Orleans and bordering the Gulf of Mexico, about ninety percent of Plaquemines is swamp (Jeansonne 1995, 1). A strong masculinist desire for white control characterized Perez's regime, which materialized in the form of autocratic leadership that safeguarded white supremacy. After the discovery of oil in the parish, Perez created a stable source of income to keep his watery empire afloat. Under his rule, the wetlands of Plaquemines mutated into a breeding ground for an American form of authoritarianism that was based on creating order in a marshland that was perceived as chaotic, with detrimental consequences for the natural environment and its vulnerable inhabitants, both human and nonhuman (Horowitz 2020, 22).

[1] The Mason-Dixon is a demarcation line that separates the North from the South.

Such a desire to bring the swamp under control already appeared in the colonial era, when the wetlands south of New Orleans operated as a site of resistance against enslavers. During the late eighteenth century, when Louisiana was a Spanish colony, maroons controlled the marshy hinterland territory called Terre Gaillarde. Spanish officials complained about the inaccessible and secluded nature of the area; Governor Esteban Miró bemoaned how one "had to wade through reeds in chest-high water" in order to even get there (Diouf 2014, 163). Imperial agents like Miró imagined tropical swamps as "Africanized spaces [that] pulled colonials into a hum of life and decay that compromised efforts to produce state, economic, and scientific order" (Allewaert 2013, 34), but what the colonial authorities described as a noxious fenland that had to be drained of its unruly inhabitants served as a safe haven for those trying to escape and challenge the oppression and exploitation of the plantation. Efforts to "drain the swamp" were therefore multi-layered actions, with political, economic, environmental, and racial implications. In the hinterlands of Plaquemines Parish, these interrelated meanings of "draining the swamp" took form in the politics of Leander Perez.

The Politics of Hinterland Extraction

In a biography of Perez, reporter James Conaway described the Plaquemines hinterlands as an isolated area that had "little in common with the rest of the territorial United States … a semitropical, near-primordial world of cottonwood and palmetto, sawgrass, wild cane, and cypress, floating above oil, sulphur [sic], and natural gas deposits of almost incredible abundance, subject to floods, high winds, and a sun of African intensity" (1973, 10). Yet this "near-primordial world," like the rest of the US, has persistently been subject to the ebb and flow of colonialism and capitalism. French-speaking Cajuns, Isleños from the Canary Islands, and African Americans were some of the groups that made up the diverse population of Plaquemines, and they reflected the different imperial regimes that controlled the area: France, Spain, and finally the United States. Despite its remoteness (at least from a metropolitan perspective), global trade shaped the economy of the parish: plantations, citrus farms, the seafood industry, and oil and gas firms were export-oriented businesses whose profits depended on oceanic connections and the fluctuations of the world

market. With the arrival of the petroleum companies and sulfur mining in the 1920s and 1930s, Plaquemines turned into a more industrialized space, thus reconfiguring the rural character of its wetland environment.

After World War II, demand for cheap oil and gas began to increase dramatically in the United States. Suburbanization and the specific consumer culture that came with it, in combination with a global quest for natural resources to beat the Soviet Union and make the world "safe for democracy," led to a rapid expansion of oil and gas drilling (Mitchell 2013, 121–122; Theriot 2014, 5–6). During the 1940s, experts in Louisiana already recognized a change in attitude by the oil companies toward the state's gas reserves. "Until very recently natural gas was looked upon by the petroleum industry as a necessary evil and for the most part ignored and avoided," state geologist John Huner and chief petroleum engineer F.V. Carter declared (Carter and Huner n.d.). But the times were changing; according to Huner and Carter, gas was "rapidly developing vast potentialities as a raw material for a huge chemical industry." They recommended "an orderly and systematic" program to regulate the conservation and management of Louisiana's gas resources that would "promote a reasonable state of cooperation" between government officials and industry representatives (Carter and Huner n.d.). For effective resource extraction, the messy wetlands needed to be brought under control.

By the time Carter and Huner's (n.d.) report came out, the petroleum business had already established a firm foothold in Louisiana and altered the state's economy, which used to be dominated by plantation agriculture. Before the discovery of oil in Plaquemines, working-class residents of the parish primarily lived off trapping, fishing, and hunting. The marshlands were full of fish, shrimp, crabs, alligators, and fur-bearing animals such as muskrats, otters, and raccoons. They were also rich in the type of minerals energy companies were eager to mine. Besides the nascent chemical industry in Louisiana, fast-growing cities in the Northeast such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York hungered after natural gas. This increased demand for gas during the 1950s made the construction of pipelines connecting the hinterlands of the South with northern metropolises profitable.

Leander Perez was a central figure in the Plaquemines oil and gas business. The Perezes were one of the oldest Catholic families in the parish. Leander's father, Roselius "Fice" Perez, owned two plantations, where he grew sugarcane and rice. At the end of the nineteenth century, Fice Perez

was actively involved in overthrowing Republican rule in Plaquemines, which culminated in the reinstitution of "home rule" by white supremacist Democrats (Jeansonne 1995, 2–3). Leander was born in 1891 and became an infamous defender of segregation in his adult life; journalist Robert Sherrill called him "Dixie's loudest racial hawk, screeching from the damp, impregnable thickets of Plaquemines" (1968, 9). As the political boss of the parish, the oil companies could not circumvent him. Perez was not always easy to negotiate with. He prided himself on providing for his constituents and forced oilmen to hire locals if they wanted to construct pipelines or drill in the parish. His politics were a combination of racialized paternalism and "good old boy" networking, which meant that transactions happened in the backrooms through informal conversations (Theriot 2014, 52).

White citizens appreciated Perez's racist leadership and what it did for them. "Thanks to the Judge, every man in Plaquemines Parish can be a king if he wants to," a motel owner told James Conaway (1973, 154). Local civil rights attorney Joe Defly used different words to describe the political culture of the parish, however: "I consider it to be an absolute dictatorship, the closest thing that you can find to it in this country" (Bernstein 1980). An extractive, for-profit logic guided the activities of the oil business and other white-owned companies in the parish that tried to exploit Black labor. This was for instance visible in the seafood industry, which was another important economic sector in Plaquemines. Like plantation agriculture, the oystering business transformed into a large-scale and more mechanized enterprise during the postwar period. Perez made sure to put whites in charge of the big boats, with Black oystercatchers working for them, getting paid by the sack. In order to escape this "sharecropping on the water," Black residents of the parish eventually acquired their own little skiffs and collect oysters with smaller dredges, creating an independent economic space for themselves and an eco-friendlier method of harvesting shellfish (Barra 2019, 118–122).

Civil rights activists considered Louisiana dangerous territory, even in comparison to other notoriously racist and violent Deep South states like neighboring Mississippi (Markowitz and Rosner 2013, 242). Within this oppressive climate, Plaquemines was ground zero; according to civil rights historian Adam Fairclough, it was "the most repressive parish" in the state and Leander Perez "the most powerful ultrasegregationist in Louisiana" (1995, 327). Perez threatened to use an eighteenth-century Spanish fort surrounded by snake-infested swamps and marshland as a prison for civil

rights workers. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) thought Plaquemines was not "the kind of place you go into on a whim … Negroes in the parish are very secretive. They don't know who to trust, so they trust no one" (qtd. in Conaway 1973, 153).

Local Black activists set up the Underground Right to Vote Movement (URVM), a covert network that drew its inspiration from the Underground Railroad, an abolitionist alliance that helped runaways escape from the South during the antebellum era. Like the Underground Railroad, the Plaquemines movement had "conductors" who set up "stations" throughout the parish where they could meet with civil rights workers, often under the cover of darkness. The conductors also gave education clinics that prepared Black residents to pass the discriminatory tests put in place to disenfranchise African Americans. In addition to these secret activities, the URVM confronted the Jim Crow system directly, for instance through drives to register Black voters at the Plaquemines courthouse in Pointe à la Hache. Although groups from outside the parish like CORE offered valuable assistance, local organizing through the Underground Movement was a critical component of the effort to undermine Leander Perez, ultimately drawing the attention of the U.S. Civil Rights Division (Edwards 2017, 104–116, 135; Van Meter 2020, 175).

Perez's hinterland regime was toxic in multiple ways: it not only ensured white supremacy through explicit racist practices and codes, but also through environmentally destructive activities that filled the coffers of his political machine. Large-scale oystering and especially the petroleum business transformed the ecology of the parish, turning it into a semi-industrialized landscape that was more vulnerable to disasters like hurricanes, because natural wetland barriers had disappeared. By draining the swamp of Plaquemines, oil companies such as Standard Oil and Shell directly subsidized the strongman politics of Leander Perez.

His reign did not go unchallenged, however. Grassroots civil rights groups including the URVM formed a covert network to mobilize people in the African American communities of the parish, while Black fishermen were able to circumvent the white-dominated oystering industry (Edwards 2017, 104, 187–190). They used the hinterland ecology of Plaquemines as a revolutionary environment to subvert the Jim Crow regulations that defined them as second-class citizens, like other oppositional bodies such as the maroons of Terre Gaillarde or the demonstrators who mobilized in Ferguson, Missouri, after the 2014 police shooting of Michael Brown. Neel typifies Ferguson as an example of "the underfunded near-hinterland

of sprawling suburbia," a once-affluent space whose "lack of surveillance, its decentralization, the ease with which rioters could move between street, forest, and fenced-in yard" made it difficult for law enforcement to control (2020, 135, 141). Although their tactics, circumstances, and surroundings differed, these various collectives of hinterland insurgents that fought white supremacy all managed to form sites of rebellion in oppressive climates.

Oiling the Jim Crow Machine, Mainstreaming the Hinterland

Absolute control was central to the political model introduced by Perez in Plaquemines. He desired control over its natural environment, its inhabitants, and its economy, all for his own benefit, although his friend, Louisiana Congressman F. Edward Hébert, preferred to call the Judge's leadership a benevolent despotism that provided for the people in the parish. "This country needs more like him," Hébert added, "from the top to the bottom" (qtd. in Conaway 1973, 5). Perez's autocratic rule in the deltaic hinterlands of the Mississippi River may have been extreme even for Louisiana standards, but its main tendencies found their way to a broader audience through several venues, which will be examined in this part of the chapter. The mainstreaming of Perez's politics could happen because its most prominent features—racialized authoritarianism, corruption, and an obsession with oil—were in fact representative of the overall political culture of Louisiana. Louisiana's economy "is closer akin to the Arab sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf," *New Yorker* correspondent A. J. Liebling observed in 1961, adding: "Oil gets into politics, and politicians, making money in office, get into oil. The state slithers around in it" (Liebling 1970, 70–71). Segregationists actually saw oil revenues as the financial basis for the perpetuation of Jim Crow apartheid.

By the late 1940s and 1950s, the defense of segregation became increasingly tied up with control over oil and gas reserves located in the so-called tidelands. Tidelands are mineral-rich coastline areas with the potential of yielding huge profits through drilling. Both the federal government and Jim Crow states along the Gulf Coast claimed ownership over them, resulting in prolonged legal battles that went all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court (Miller 1997, 208–215). Withholding federal supervision over the tidelands was an important objective of the States' Rights

Democratic Party, a renegade faction of Jim Crow Democrats who participated as an independent slate in the 1948 presidential race to defeat incumbent Harry Truman and his civil rights agenda. Because the States' Rights Democrats had their strongest base of support in the South, they were soon labeled Dixiecrats.[2] Their position on tidelands control explains the involvement of high-profile oilmen such as Texas industrialist Hugh Roy Cullen in the Dixiecrat Party (Frederickson 2001, 168–169; Horowitz 2020, 42). The oil companies thought it was easier to deal with officials at the local and state levels than with the federal government, while southern segregationists wanted to use oil money coming out of the tidelands to finance their bipartite social system (Conaway 1973, 83–84; Sherrill 1968, 10).

Perez played an important role in the 1948 campaign of the Dixiecrats. For him, the Dixiecrat effort was a useful conduit to lift his extractive hinterland politics to the national stage. Historian Kari Frederickson writes that the "real power behind the states' rights movement in Louisiana was Leander Perez, the swaggering political boss of mineral-rich Plaquemines Parish" (2001, 115). The Dixiecrats failed to make a decisive impact on the outcome of the election and many returned to the Democratic Party after the 1948 campaign. A group of hardcore states' righters (including Perez) continued to believe in the Dixiecrat cause after Truman's victory, however. Some of them were even hoping to "absorb the Republican Party" and anticipated financial support from oil companies to fund their activities. "Chief donor is the oil lobby, which wants States' rights-minded politicians in power so the rich tidelands oil can be restored to the States," the *Washington Post* reported in the spring of 1949 (Washington Post 1949).

During his long political career, Perez occupied various positions of power, including legal counsel to the state of Louisiana. In that function, Perez initially masterminded Louisiana's fight with the federal government about control of the tidelands. Like the defense of segregation, the claim southern states made on the tidelands was based on states' rights ideology, which emphasizes the sovereignty of the states in dealing with matters not directly delegated to the federal government by the U.S. Constitution (Horowitz 2020, 39). In a 1951 address before the

[2] Dixie is a nickname for the US South, in particular the eleven southern plantation states that seceded from the Union in 1861 to form the Confederate States of America, an explicit attempt to safeguard slavery.

American Shore and Beach Preservation Association and the Southern States Coastal Erosion Control Association in Mobile, Alabama, Perez criticized the Supreme Court for ruling in favor of the federal government, extending Washington's jurisdiction over submerged lands. The "communistic" Court decisions were an expansion of "New Deal-Fair Deal ideologies without evidence" that had "paralyzed further exploration and development work for mineral production in our maritime belt," Perez fumed (Perez 1951, 3–4). A year later, Perez testified before a subcommittee of the U.S. House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, which held hearings in New Orleans about the tidelands. In a detailed historical exposé, he tried to explain how Louisiana had received its vast aquatic possessions "by heritage from our forefathers" (US House of Representatives 1951, 226). These links with history—with forefathers and Founding Fathers—were an important element of segregationist doctrine, because they gave it legitimacy in the face of ideologies and ideas that were deemed foreign and new, such as communism and racial integration.

Other members of Louisiana's white power structure voiced similar messages, despite factional conflicts among the political elite about the right approach to defend Jim Crow and keep Louisiana in control of the tidelands. In 1958, for example, State Attorney General Jack Gremillion professed his complete commitment to segregation in a speech at a gathering of Shreveport's Rotary Club: "With all the talent and energy I possess, I have fought to preserve segregation, [as] it offers the only alternative to racial strife" (1958, 9–10). Gremillion did not just talk about segregation, however. He also gave the Shreveport Rotarians an update about the ongoing tidelands dispute with the federal government and he pointed out how important protection of the oil industry was for the socioeconomic well-being of Louisiana. "The present recession in the industry has demonstrated how closely the oil economy and the welfare of the State is connected," Gremillion explained. "We must guard our oil resources on [the] one hand and properly develop them on the other" (Gremillion 1958, 11–12).

A year later, in an address at the American Petroleum Institute (API) in Houma, Louisiana, Gremillion again emphasized how the federal refusal to let Louisiana exploit offshore oilfields was the direct cause for the state's "economy trending downwards, school-building dollars disappearing, purchasing power dwindling" (1959). Yet Gremillion did not despair: the conflict over tidelands control had been "a long fight [but] we are

confident we will win it. When we will win is the multi-million dollar question now" (1959, underlining in original). State-controlled drilling would provide the financial buffer necessary to secure Louisiana's institutions (including segregation) for the future.

After his election to attorney general in 1956, Gremillion provoked the ire of Perez when he decided not to involve the Plaquemines strongman as legal counsel in the tidelands cases and ignore his advice. Perez's rather outlandish behavior inside and outside the courtroom harmed Louisiana's interests, Gremillion thought. The Judge did not take it lightly. "Perez would intimidate me, and attempt to intimidate me everywhere he possibly could," Gremillion recalled. "He'd just, he declaimed me as inferior, he declaimed me as a nincompoop, of course a lot of people began to realize that there was some truth in what I was saying, and they begin to realize that Perez wasn't nothing [sic] but a dictator" (Hebert 1996, 20).

By distancing himself from Perez, Gremillion attempted to give the segregationist desire of tidelands control an air of respectability. But the difference was in degree, not substance; although Gremillion's political style may have been less brazen than Perez's explicit racism, his more toned-down attitude toward the defense of Jim Crow and the interconnected issue of tidelands control was nothing more than a calculated effort to keep Louisiana's white supremacist socioeconomic system intact, to the detriment of Black Louisianans and the state's vulnerable wetland ecosystem. Perez's hinterland authoritarianism, then, was not a contained phenomenon limited to the marshlands of southern Louisiana, but an ideology shared by the state's business and political elite, albeit in a somewhat diluted form.

The Hinterland as Harbinger

What if the hinterland is a harbinger of things to come? The fusion of white supremacist attitudes and the destruction of nature through extractive industries continues to affect the political culture of the Bayou State until this day. In April 2021, Danny McCormick, a Republican state representative from Oil City whose anti-Semitic social media posts drew criticism from organizations like the Anti-Defamation League, proposed to turn Louisiana into a "fossil fuel sanctuary state," protecting the petroleum industry against federal law (Baurick 2021; Karlin 2020). Such ideas demonstrate that Perez's hinterland ideology lives on, not just in Louisiana, but also in US conservatism more broadly. For many years, the Republican

Party attempted to keep on a mask of respectability in its defense of traditional values. Beneath that mask however, the hinterland lurked, exposing itself with the surprise victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 Republican primaries and that year's presidential campaign. During his time in the White House, Trump enacted an agenda and practiced a political style that followed the Perez blueprint: he bullied and intimidated opponents inside and outside his own party, engaged in gaslighting and conspiracy thinking, fostered corruption, and catered to white supremacists and the fossil fuel industry. His attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 election exposed the disrespect of Trump's strongman regime for the mechanisms of democracy.

How did the Republican Party transform into a natural habitat for the authoritarian principles espoused by Perez? In his book *Carbon Democracy*, political theorist Timothy Mitchell explains how oil production, in contrast with the coal industry during the nineteenth century, is not conducive to democratic mobilization and labor activism. "Oil production often grew rapidly, in regions remote from large populations, to serve distant users in places already industrialised with coal," Mitchell writes. "Unlike the movement of coal, the flow of oil could not readily be assembled into a machine that enabled large numbers of people to exercise novel forms of political power" (2013, 36–39). Like the oil from the hinterlands of Plaquemines found its way to other parts of the country, its authoritarian politics eventually became part of Republican Party doctrine. After the 1948 Dixiecrat campaign, Perez supported Republican Dwight Eisenhower during the 1950s, because of Eisenhower's initial support for state control over offshore oil drilling (Jeansonne 1995, 193–195). The Judge was at first also very enthusiastic about US Senator Barry Goldwater, the reactionary firebrand from Arizona who revamped the Republican Party after surprisingly capturing its presidential nomination in 1964. "If I read Goldwater right, he is a product of the wide open spaces," Perez said. "He has strength. He is a good American, dedicated to Constitutional government" (qtd. in Conaway 1973, 141). Four years later, Perez threw his support behind another kindred spirit, both ideologically and regionally: Governor George Wallace of Alabama, the segregationist rabble-rouser who did surprisingly well in the 1968 presidential campaign as a third-party candidate.

Perez's endorsement of Goldwater linked the swamps of Plaquemines with the desert of the Southwest and the Sunbelt suburbs. "Landlocked, isolated, a rural state still in the process of growth and development from the raw frontier, Arizona is essentially self-centered," journalist Fred

J. Cook described Goldwater's home state in 1964 (54). Like Louisiana, Arizona formed a fecund ecosystem for right-wing extremism to take root. "This is a society that, not unnaturally, expresses itself in the fanatical voice of the Radical Right—and, in its innocence, considers the raucous tones of fanaticism the essence of sweet reason" (Cook 1964, 55). The Goldwater campaign set the Republican Party on a course that was more in line with Perez's states' rights ideology, eventually culminating in the rise of Trump (Zwiers 2019, 1, 10–11). As the owner of Mar-A-Lago ("Sea-to-Lake") in Palm Beach, Florida and the Trump Tower in Manhattan, Trump quite literally connected the swampy hinterlands of the South with the "palatial urban cores" Neel writes about—the centers of global metropolises like New York that are home to FIRE (Finance, Insurance, Real Estate) industries, law firms, and marketing companies (2020, 9–10).

On 6 January 2021, a large contingent of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in an attempt to disrupt the certification of the 2020 election results. The same Far-Right organizations that mobilized in the far hinterland were in the vanguard of the siege. However, these groups (Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, Three Percenters) merely served as the shock troops of a right-wing political class whose momentum had been gathering for decades. Its agenda closely resembled the toxic authoritarianism Perez exercised in the Plaquemines wetlands. Yet, as this chapter has shown, the hinterland's politics are not unitary: despite the near-totalitarian nature of the Judge's rule in the parish, grassroots opposition groups found ways to mobilize there and contribute to the downfall of the Perez oligarchy (Fairclough 1995, 465–466). Even within such an oppressive climate, antiracist agents of change managed to carve out spaces for themselves and at times succeeded in reconfiguring the political ecology of the hinterland.

Acknowledgment This chapter emerged from "Race Land: The Ecology of Segregation," a multi-year research project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 891936.

References

Allewaert, Monique. 2013. *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Barra, Monica Patrice. 2019. *Losing Louisiana: Techno-Science, and the Disappearing Geographies of the Lower Mississippi River Delta*. PhD Dissertation. City University of New York.

Baurick, Tristan. 2021. Should Louisiana Be a 'Sanctuary State' for Oil and Gas? This Bill Would Make It So. *NOLA.com*, 18 April.

Bernstein, Joel. 1980. Sons of Leander. *60 Minutes*, 30 November. CBS Television Network.

Carter, F. V., and J. Huner, Jr. n.d. *Program for Regulating Production and Conservation of Louisiana's Gas Resources*. William Walter Jones Collection of Sam Houston Jones Papers. Manuscripts Collection 409, Box 162, Folder 4. Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

Castille, Philip. 1990. Review of *The Edge of the Swamp: A Study of the Literature and Society of the Old South*, by Louis D. Rubin. *Studies in the Novel* 22 (4): 486–489.

Conaway, James. 1973. *Judge: The Life and Times of Leander Perez*. New York: Knopf.

Cook, Fred J. 1964. *Barry Goldwater: Extremist of the Right*. New York: Grove Press.

Diouf, Sylviane A. 2014. *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons*. New York: New York University Press.

Edwards, Tyronne, Rev. 2017. *The Forgotten People: Restoring a Missing Segment of Plaquemines Parish History*. Bloomington: Xlibris.

Fairclough, Adam. 1995. *Race & Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Frederickson, Kari. 2001. *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932–1968*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Gremillion, Jack P.F. 1958. *Address to the Shreveport Rotary Club*. 19 August. Jack P.F. Gremillion Papers. Manuscripts Collection 772, Folder 4. Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

———. 1959. *Address to the API*. Houma, LA, 15 January. Jack P.F. Gremillion Papers. Manuscripts Collection 772, Folder 6. Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

Hebert, Mary. 1996. Interview with Jack P.F. Gremillion, Session IV. T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana State University, 31 January. https://bit.ly/3uuvL8z.

Horowitz, Andy. 2020. *Katrina: A History, 1915–2015*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Jeansonne, Glen. 1995 [1977]. *Leander Perez: Boss of the Delta*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Karlin, Sam. 2020. Louisiana State Rep Posts, Then Deletes Anti-Semitic Meme that Drew Fire from Anti-Hate Group. *The Advocate*, 3 September.

Liebling, A. J. 1970 [1961]. *The Earl of Louisiana*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Markowitz, Gerald, and David Rosner. 2013 [2003]. *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Mencken, H.L. 1977 [1917]. The Sahara of the Bozart. In *The American Scene: A Reader*, ed. Huntington Cairns, 157–168. New York: Knopf.

Miller, George Blaine. 1997. Louisiana's Tidelands Controversy: The United States of America v. State of Louisiana Maritime Boundary Cases. *Louisiana History* 38 (2): 203–221.

Mitchell, Timothy. 2013 [2011]. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*. London: Verso.

Neel, Phil A. 2020 [2018]. *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict*. London: Reaktion Books.

Perez, Leander. 1951. *The Tidelands Question*. American Shore and Beach Preservation Association and the Southern States Coastal Erosion Control Association Meeting, 28 April, Mobile, AL. Leander H. Perez Collection, Box 1, Folder: Speeches and Pamphlets by L.H. Perez. City Archives and Special Collections, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA.

Perry, Imani. 2022. *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation*. New York: HarperCollins.

Sherrill, Robert. 1968. *Gothic Politics in the Deep South: Stars of the New Confederacy*. New York: Grossman Publishers.

Theriot, Jason P. 2014. *American Energy, Imperiled Coast: Oil and Gas Development in Louisiana's Wetlands*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

US House of Representatives. 1951. *Hearing of the Subcommittee of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs*. 10–11 December, New Orleans, LA. Leander H. Perez Collection, Box 3, Folder: Federal Documents Relating to Perez and/or Louisiana. City Archives and Special Collections, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA.

Van Meter, Matthew. 2020. *Deep Delta Justice: A Black Teen, His Lawyer, and Their Groundbreaking Battle for Civil Rights in the South*. London: Little, Brown.

Washington Post. 1949. *Dixiecrats Have Plans*. 16 April.

Zwiers, Maarten. 2019. The Whistles of George Wallace: Gender and Emotions in the 1968 Presidential Campaign. *European Journal of American Studies* 14 (1): 1–12.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.